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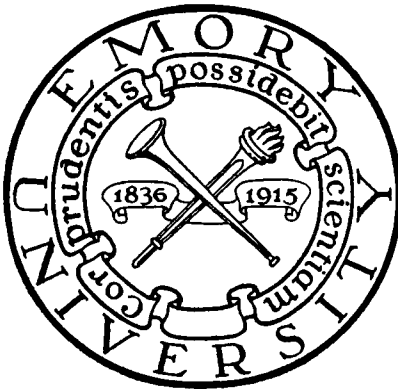
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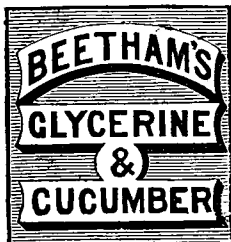
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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

CHAPTER I.

OUT WITH THE ROYAL BUCKHOUNDS.

"AND your name is Alison," said the young man, looking tenderly in the girl's eyes of soft gray-blue, that long, dark lashes shaded. "Yet I hear some of your friends call you Lisette."

"It is, I believe, the same thing—an old Scoto-French name, long peculiar to our family—the Cheynes of Essilmont—as papa would say if he were here," she added, with a soft smile. Then after a pause she asked: "How did you learn, Captain Goring, that it was Alison?"

"By looking in Debreton after I first had the pleasure" (he had well-nigh said the joy) "of meeting you at the General's garden-party at Aldershot."

This simple avowal of an interest in her (but it might only be curiosity) caused the girl to colour a little and nervously readjust her reins, though her horse, pretty well blown after a long run, was now going at an easy walk, pace by pace, with the larger and stronger bay hunter of her companion, and she glanced shyly at him as he rode by her side, for Bevil Goring, in his perfect hunting costume—his coat, buckskins, and boots, his splendid strength and engaging debonair expression of face, his soldierly set up, born of infantry service in India—was all that might please a woman's eye, however critical; and he in his turn felt that every pulse in his frame would long beat to the slight incidents of that day's glorious scamper together on horseback.

Gathered into a tight coil under her smart riding hat and dark blue veil, Alison Cheyne's hair was of that bright and rare tint when the brown seems to blend with or melt into amber, and these into a warmer tint still in the sunshine, and with which there is generally a pure and dazzling complexion.

"It was so kind of you, Captain Goring," said Miss Cheyne, after a pause, "to invite papa down to dine at your mess at Aldershot."

"Not at all. Dalton, Jerry Wilmot, and all the other fellows were most glad to see the old gentleman. I only fear that he thought us rather a noisy lot."

"It delighted him—we live but a dull life at Chilcote."

"And you have had two brothers in the service, Mrs. Trelawney told me?" resumed Goring, by no means anxious to let the conversation drop, or his companion begin to think of friends who might be looking for her.

"Yes—two, much older than I, however—poor Ranald and golden-haired Ellon."

"What a curious name!"

"It is a place in Aberdeenshire where much of papa's property once lay. Ranald died of fever, and was buried in the lonely jungle near the Jumna."

"Illness there does its work quickly—four-and-twenty hours will see the beginning and the end, and the green turf covering all. I have seen much of it in my time, Miss Cheyne—often buried the dead with my own hands, by Jove!"

"How sad to die as my poor brother did—so far away," said the girl, her soft voice breaking a little. "We have a saying in Scotland: 'May you die among your kindred.'"

"In the service one's comrades become one's kindred—we are all brother soldiers."

"Ellon was thrown from his horse near Lahore, and impaled on his own sword, and so—and so—poor papa has now only me! I don't think he has ever got fairly over Ellon's death, as it left the baronetcy without an heir. But let me not think of these things."

"I remember the unfortunate event of Ellon Cheyne's death," exclaimed Goring, the colour gathering in his bronzed cheek. "It occurred just close by the Cabul road, the day after we marched in from Umritsur; and, strange to say, I commanded the firing party at the poor fellow's funeral, on a

day when the sky was like molten brass, and the wind swept past us hot and stifling like the blast from an open furnace."

"You?" said Miss Cheyne, her eyes dilating as she spoke.

"Yes; my voice gave the orders for the three funeral volleys."

"How strange—and now I meet you here!"

"The world is a small place nowadays."

Her eyes were full of a tender interest now, that made the heart of her companion thrill; nor did hers do so the less that this event caused a bond of sympathy—a subject in common between them.

A sad expression stole over the features of Alison Cheyne, and so regular were these, that with a fine outline of her profile they might have been deemed insipid, but for the variable expression of her very lovely eyes and sensitive mouth; and now, when flushed with the exercise of fast riding, the excitement of following the hounds amid such a stirring concourse, and over such an open country, they seemed absolutely beautiful.

Attracted by each other's society, she and the Captain were now somewhat apart from the field, and the brilliant hunt was waxing to its close.

The day was a bright and clear one early in October, the regular opening day of the regular season with the Royal Buckhounds. The country wore the aspect of the month; swine were rooting in the desolate cornfield, eliciting the malediction of many a huntsman as he tore over the black and rotting stubble; geese were coming draggled and dirty out of the muddy ponds and brooks; the hedges looked naked and cold, and the blackened bean sheaves that had never ripened were rotting in the ground. An earthy odour came from the water-flats, and every hoof-print was speedily filled with the black ooze of the saturated soil the moment it was made; but the sky was clear, if not quite cloudless, and the sunshine bright as one could wish.

The time-honoured meet had duly taken place at the old village of Salthill, the scene of that tomfoolery called the Eton Montem, till its suppression in 1848; and we need scarcely inform the reader that a certain sum is devoted annually to maintain the stables, kennels, and establishment of the Royal Buckhounds, and that with each change of Ministry the post of their master is an object of keen competition among

sport-loving nobles ; but the opening meet is said to be seldom a favourite one with lovers of hard riding.

There is always a vast "field," and everyone who "by hook or crook" can procure a mount is there. Salthill thus becomes an animated and pleasant spectacle to the mere spectator, while it is a source of unmixed excitement to all who go to hunt—perhaps some five hundred horsemen or so, all anxious to be first in the chase, and jostling, spurring, and struggling to be so.

All know what a scene Paddington Station presents a short time previous to the meet, when the Metropolitan corps of huntsmen begin to muster in strong force, and well-known faces are seen on every hand—staunch followers of "the Queen's"—going down by special train, the present holder of the horn being the observed of all ; and the train, with a long line of dark horse-boxes starting with sixty or seventy noble horses for Slough, whence, after an eighteen miles' run, the long cavalcade of horsemen and people on foot pours on to Salthill, huntsmen and whips bright in brilliant new costumes of scarlet laced with gold, their horses with skins like satin, and the hounds the perfection of their breed.

There may be seen young guardsmen from Windsor, cavalry men from Aldershot, which is about twenty miles distant, in spotless black and white, side by side with old fellows in tarnished pink with the old jockey-cap, horse-dealers in corduroys and perhaps blucher boots ; City men, and apparently *all* manner of men, and here and there a lady such as only may be seen in the Row, perfect in her mount, equipment, and costume.

On the adjacent road a lady's pretty little victoria may be jammed between a crowded four-in-hand and a still more crowded costermonger's cart ; and so the confusion goes on till some well-known deer is quietly taken away to the front ; and punctually to time the master gives the order to advance, when the huntsmen and hounds scurry into an open field, where the yeomen prickers in their Lincoln green costumes have uncartered the quarry.

Anon the line is formed, and away over the open country stream the hounds like a living tide, with red tongues out, and steam issuing from their quivering nostrils, and all follow at headlong speed.

Here it was that Alison Cheyne, Bevil Goring, and others of their party lost some of their companions in the first wild

rush across a hedge with a wet ditch on the other side. Jerry Wilmot's saddle-girth gave way, and he fell in a helpless but unhurt heap on the furrows; Lord Cadbury—a peer of whom more anon—failed utterly to clear the hedge; and Tony Dalton, of Goring's regiment, though a keen sportsman, came to grief somehow in the ditch, and thus ere long Alison Cheyne had as her sole squire the companion we have described, and together, after charging with many more a gate beyond the hedge, they had a splendid run over an open country.

Together they kept, Goring doing much in the way of guiding his fair friend, who though somewhat timid, and not much practised as an equestrienne, had now given her whole soul to the hunt, and became almost fearless for the time.

In a pretty dense clump "the field" went powdering along the path through the village of Farnham, after which the deer headed off for Burnham Beeches, the beautiful scenery of which has been so often portrayed by artists and extolled by tourists; and then, like bright "bits of colour" that would delight the former, the scarlet coats could be seen glancing between the gnarled stems of the giant trees, as the horsemen went pouring down the woody steeps.

"Take care here, for heaven's sake, Miss Cheyne, and keep your horse well in hand, with its head up," cried Bevil Goring. "The tree stumps concealed here among the long grass are most treacherous traps."

"I fear more the boughs of the trees, they are so apt to tear one's hair," replied the flushed girl, breathlessly, as she flew, her dark blue skirt and veil streaming behind her; and now and then a cry of terror escaped her, as a horse and its rider went floundering into some marshy pool, though generally with no worse result than a mud bath.

At length the beeches are left behind, while the deer shoots on past Wilton Park, anon over Chalfont Brook, till she reaches the stable in a farmyard, and there is captured and made safe, and so ends the day, after which there is nothing left for the breathless and blown, who have followed her thus far, but to ride slowly back some fifteen miles to Slough.

Less occupied by interest in the hunt than with each other, Bevil Goring and Miss Cheyne had gradually dropped out of it, and at the time of the conversation with which this chapter opens were riding slowly along a narrow green lane that led—they had not yet begun to consider in what precise direction.

CHAPTER II.

AT CHILCOTE.

"THE hounds threw off at half-past eleven, and the afternoon is far advanced," said Miss Cheyne, with a little anxiety of manner. "I must take the nearest cut home."

"Thither, of course, I shall do myself the honour of escorting you."

"Thanks—so much."

She could not say otherwise, as she could neither decline his escort nor with propriety ride home alone; yet she gave a glance rather helplessly around her, as all her immediate friends—and *one* more especially, whose escort her father wished her to have had—were now left miles behind, having "come to grief" at the first fence, and were now she knew not where.

But then she thought it was not her fault that they had dropped out of the hunt, or out of their saddles perhaps.

"To reach the high-road, we must take this fence," said Captain Goring, finding that the narrow lane they had pursued, ended in a species of *cul-de-sac*.

"Not a gap, not a gate is in sight."

"And by Jove, Miss Cheyne, it is a rasper!" he exclaimed.

"Allow me to go first, then follow, head up and hand low."

He measured the distance, cleared the fence, and came safely down on the hard road beyond.

With a little cry of half delight and half terror curiously mingled, the girl rushed her horse at the fence, but barely cleared it, as its hoofs touched the summit.

"What a nasty buck jump!" said Goring. "Is that an Irish horse, used to double fences, I wonder?"

"And all my back hair has come down."

"Glorious hair it is, below your waist and more."

"And all my own," said the girl laughing, as she placed her switch between her pearly teeth, and with her gauntleted hands proceeded to knot the coils deftly up; "all my own, by production, and not by purchase. And now for home," she added, as they broke into an easy trot. "Such a hard mouth this animal has!" she exclaimed, after a pause; "my poor wrists are quite weary."

"Why do you ride him?"

"I have not much choice."

"How?"

"I owe my mount to the kindness of a friend of papa's, to Lord Cadbury," she replied, colouring slightly, but with an air of annoyance.

"Indeed," said Goring, briefly; and then after a pause, he added, "you have ridden with these hounds before."

"Yes, once when the meet was at Iver's Heath, and again when it was at Wokingham, and the deer was caught in a pond near Wilton Park."

"And did Lord Cadbury on each occasion give you a mount?" he added, in a casual manner.

"Yes, we have no horses at Chilcote; but how curious you are!" she replied, colouring again, and with a sense of annoyance that he did not suspect, though the mention of the peer's name by her lips irritated Bevil Goring, and made him seek to repress the love that was growing in his heart.

Yet he knew not that he had impressed Alison Cheyne by his voice and manner beyond anyone whom she had hitherto met, but she was conscious that her heart beat quicker when he addressed her, and that the very sunshine seemed to grow brighter in his presence; but to what end was all this, she thought, unless—if he loved her—he was rich enough to suit her father's standard of wealth.

As they drew near Chilcote they tacitly, it seemed, reduced the pace of their horses to a walk.

"If it does not grieve you now to recur to the fate of your brother Ellon," said Goring, in his softest tone, "I may mention that I have a little souvenir of him, of which I would beg your acceptance."

"A souvenir of Ellon!"

"Yes."

"How came you to possess it?"

"When his effects were sold at Lahore, before his regiment marched again."

"And this relic——"

"Is a ring with a girl's hair in it."

"Thank you so much," said she, with a quivering lip; "but to deprive you——"

"Nay, nay, do not begin to speak thus. To whom should it belong but to you? And how strange is the chance that gives me an opportunity of presenting it!"

"I cannot decline it ; but the girl—who can she have been ? Poor Ellon, some secret is buried in his grave."

"Soldiers' graves, I doubt not, hide many, and many a sad romance. I have generally worn it, curious to say, as my stock of jewellery is not very extensive."

"Have you it with you now ?"

"No, I never wear rings when riding, the stones are apt to get knocked out. I meant to do myself the pleasure of calling on you after the hunt ; and shall, if you will permit me. To-morrow I am for guard."

"For guard over what ?"

"Nothing," he said, laughing. "There is nothing to see or to guard, but it is all the same to John Bull."

"The day after, then ?"

"The day after."

They were close to the house now, and, lifting his hat, he bowed low and turned his horse just as a groom, who had been waiting in the porch, took hers by the bridle, and, waving the handle of her switch to him in farewell, Miss Cheyne gathered up her riding skirt and entered the house.

Bevil Goring lingered at the further end of the avenue that led to Chilcote, which was in a lovely locality, especially in summer, one of those sunny places within thirty miles of St. Paul's, and one secluded and woody—a place like Burnham Beeches, where the tree trunks are of amazing size, and the path that led to the house went down a deep dell, emblossomed in a wilderness leafy at all times but in winter.

The ash, the birch, and contorted beeches overhung the slopes on each side, and there seemed an entire absence of human care about them ; and there in summer the sheep wandered among the tender grass, as if they were the only owners of the domain ; but Bevil Goring had but one thought as he looked around him, and then turned lingeringly away.

"How delicious to ramble among these leafy glades with her ! How deuced glad I am that I have that poor fellow's ring, and can gratify her—perhaps myself too. Bother the guard of to-morrow ; but I must get it over as best I may."

He lighted a cigar, and at a trot took the road to Aldershot ; but so sunk in thoughts that were new and delicious that he forgot all about his "soothing weed" till it scorched his thick dark moustache.

Meanwhile let us follow Alison Cheyne into her somewhat sequestered home.

She had blushed with annoyance when resigning the reins of her horse to Gaskins, Lord Cadbury's groom, while thinking that there was neither groom nor stable at Chilcote, though, as her father had told her many a time and oft, there were stalls for four-and-twenty nags at Essilmont, where others stabled their horses now ; and sooth to tell, for causes yet to be told, she was provoked at being under any obligation to old Lord Cadbury, especially in the now reduced state of their fortunes.

She was received with a bright smile of welcome in the entrance hall by their sole male attendant, old Archie Auchindoir, Sir Ranald's man-of-all-work, who looked resentfully after the unconscious groom while taking away the horse, which he would gladly have retained for his young mistress by force if he could, for Archie thought regretfully of the once ample *ménage* at far away Essilmont, where, like his father before him, he had grown to manhood and age in the family of the Cheynes.

He was true as steel to his old master, to whom, however, he sometimes ventured to say sharp things in the way of advice ; and to the "pock-puddings," as he called the denizens of the present locality, he fearlessly said sharper and very cutting things with a smirk on his mouth and a glitter in his keen gray eyes, and with perfect impunity, as they were addressed in a language to the hearers unknown ; but it gratified Archie none the less to utter them, as he often did in the guise of proverbs.

"Papa at home ?" asked Alison.

"Yes, miss," said he, receiving her gloves and switch. "And waiting anxiously for you, though ower proud to show it even to me ; but, my certie, it's the life o' an auld hat to be weel cockit."

Their household was so small now that Alison had no maid to attend upon her, and quickly changing her costume she sought at once the presence of her father, smoothing her hair with her white hands as she hurried to receive his kiss ; for, so far as he was concerned, Alison, in her twentieth year, was as much a child as when in her little frocks.

He was seated in a little room called his study, though there were few books there ; but there were a writing-table usually littered with letters, and invariably with an unpleasant mass of accounts to amount "rendered" ; an easy-chair, deep, high-backed, and cosy, in which he passed most of his time, and

which was so placed that from it he had a full view of the long, woody, and neglected avenue. There he spent hours reading *The Field* and turning over books on farming, veterinary surgery, and so forth, by mere force of habit, though he had not an acre of land or a dog or a horse to look after now ; and these studies were varied by the perusal of prints of a Conservative tendency, and an occasional dip into the pages of Burke.

He courteously threw into the fire the end of the cigar he had been smoking as his daughter entered, and twining her soft arm round him said, while nestling her face in his neck :

"Oh, papa, I have never had so delightful a day with the hounds as this !"

The master of a broken fortune and impoverished household, Sir Ranald Cheyne, baronet of Essilmont and that ilk, as he duly figured in that year's volume of Burke and Debrett, with a pedigree going far beyond the first baronet of his house, who had been patented in 1625, and duly infest at the Castle Gate of Edinburgh with a vast patrimony in Nova Scotia, and "power of pit and gallows" over his vassals there, was a proud and querulous man, stately in manner and somewhat cold and selfish to all men, save his daughter Alison, who was the apple of his eye, the pride of his old heart, on whose beauty, as the means of winning another fortune, all his hopes in life were based, and with whom he was now living in semi-obscurity at Chilcote, a small, venerable and secluded mansion in Hampshire.

Sir Ranald had a pale and worn face that in youth had been eminently handsome ; his silver hair, or rather what remained of it, was brushed back behind his wax-like ears, and a smile of great tenderness for his daughter, the last of his old, old race and the hope of his age, lighted up his aristocratic features.

A gold-rimmed *pince-nez* was balanced on the thin ridge of his rather aquiline nose, and though his bright blue eyes were smiling, as we say, their normal expression may be described as usually one of "worry."

His voice was in unison with his face—it was worn too, if we may use the expression, yet soft and not unmusical.

"You had an escort to the gate, I saw?" said he, interrogatively. "Lord Cadbury, of course ; why did he not come in?"

"Oh, no ; I missed him in the field somewhere."

"And your escort?"

"Was Captain Goring—you know him—from Aldershot," she replied, a little nervously.

"Again?" said Sir Ranald, with just the slightest shade of displeasure flitting over his face. "You were safely driven to the meet by Mrs. Trelawney?"

"Yes; and, when I last saw her and dear little Netty, their victoria was wedged between a drag and a tax-cart. I do hope they escaped without harm."

"I hope so, too, for she is a very charming woman. And you found Cadbury duly waiting at Salthill with his horses?"

"Yes; and Gaskins came here to get mine."

"I hope you duly thanked Cadbury."

"Of course, papa."

"But why did he not make an effort to escort you home?" asked Sir Ranald, whom this point interested.

"I missed him in the running, as I said, papa," replied Alison, colouring now. "He is so slow at his fences."

"Slow? He has the reputation of generally riding faster than his horse," said Sir Ranald, who was unable to repress a joke at the *parvenu* peer, whom he was not without quiet hopes of having for a son-in-law. "Then, I suppose, Captain Goring was your escort for most of the day?"

"Yes," replied Alison, frankly.

"In fact, I may presume that you and he were always neck-and-neck; taking your fences together, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no, papa; certainly not," replied Alison, thinking it was unwise to admit too much, though her father's surmises were very near the truth.

"I am astonished that Cadbury did not make an effort to join you."

"I never saw him after the hounds threw off," said Alison, a little wearily, as she knew how her father's secret thoughts were tending.

"Did you look for him?"

"No."

"So—so—this is exactly what happened before."

"Can I help it, papa, if his wont is to fail at the first fence?"

"You can help Captain Goring so opportunely taking his place."

"I do not quite see what his place is; but, oh, papa, what

do you think? Captain Goring heard of poor Ellon in India—he actually laid him in his grave, if one may say so!”

“How?”

“He commanded the soldiers who fired over it.”

“Indeed!” said Sir Ranald, with some interest now.

She was about to mention the proffered ring, which she deemed a precious relic, when her father said with a tone of some gravity, and even crustily:

“I don’t much like your following the hounds, and think you must give it up.”

“Oh, it is delightful; and if I had a horse of my own——”

“There you go!” exclaimed her father with a petty gush of irritation; “I don’t like it! Think how a girl looks in an October morning at a cover-side, her eyes watering, perhaps her nose red, and her cheeks blue, and after a while, perhaps, with her hat smashed, her habit torn, her hair hanging down her back, and some fellow fagging by her side drearily when he wishes her at the devil; or think of her learning to talk of curbs and spavins, hocks, stifle, and thoroughpin, like the gentleman jockey of a dragoon corps.”

“Oh, you dear old thing!” exclaimed Alison, caressing him and laughing, though she knew that his irritation was caused only by her having permitted Bevil Goring to take the place of her elderly and titled admirer. “I have so little amusement here at Chilcote, papa, that I did not think you would grudge me——”

“A run with the hounds on Cadbury’s horses?” he interrupted, with a slight quiver, “but I dislike the risks you run, and the chance medley acquaintances you may meet; but pardon my petulance, darling; and now to dress for dinner, such as it is.”

Too well did Alison know that one of the acquaintances referred to was her late handsome escort; but she only said:

“I do love horses, and you remember, papa, how grieved you were when I had to relinquish, as a little girl, my dear old Shetland pony, Pepper, and you called me your ‘poor bankrupt child;’ and I did so miss Pepper with his barrel-shaped body, his shaggy mane, and velvet nose that he used to rub against my neck till I gave him a carrot or an apple.”

“Hence, I am the more grateful to Cadbury for so kindly putting his horses at your disposal; but for him,” added Sir Ranald, forgetting his recent remark, “you could not have

been in your proper place with the buckhounds, or shared in the pleasures of the day. Of course you wince when I mention Cadbury," said Sir Ranald, observing a cloudy expression flit over her face.

"Well, papa, he bores me."

"Bores you? This is scarcely grateful after all the pleasure he puts at your disposal—his horses, his box at the opera, and the bouquets, music, and so forth he so frequently sends you."

But Alison only shrugged her shoulders, while her father retired to change his costume; for either by force of old habit, or out of respect for himself, he always assumed evening dress (faded though it was) for dinner; albeit that the latter might consist of a little better than hashed mutton or scrag of mutton *à la Russe*, in which the housekeeper, Mrs. Rebecca Prune, excelled.

"I wish he would not talk to me so much of Lord Cadbury," thought Alison; "if his kindness is to be received in this fashion, I shall never accept a mount from him again, nor a piece of music either!"

In the few joyous hours she had spent—hours which the presence of Bevil Goring had, undoubtedly, served to brighten—Alison Cheyne had forgotten for a space the petty annoyances of her home life; its shifts and shams that often made her weary and sick at heart; her father's pride and frequent petulance; his constant repining at the present, and futile regret over the past; his loss of position, or rather of luxury and splendour, which the loss of fortune entailed.

CHAPTER III.

ELLON'S RING.

FOR a man of acknowledged and undoubtedly good family, Sir Ranald had rather eccentric ideas of ancestry and the value thereof. He did not certainly, like the Duke d'Aremberg or Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromartie, claim kindred with the antediluvians, nor even carry his genealogy back to the dim days of Gadifer, King of Scotland, of whom it is recorded in that most veracious record *Le Grand Chronique de Bretagne*, that with Perceforest, King of Brittany, he sailed in company

from the mouth of the Ganges, and was wrecked on the coast of Armorica ; after which they were subsequently and severally raised to the thrones of Britain and Caledonia by their mutual friend Alexander le Gentil, in the time of Julius Cæsar ; but he could solidly trace his descent from that Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont, Cairnhill, Craig and Inverugie, who was one of the barons that signed the *Litera Communitatis Scotiæ* to Edward I. of England, about the marriage of their queen, the little Maid of Norway.

Thus he had among his ancestors men who figured greatly in the troubles and wars of the olden time, who fenced with steel the throne of Robert I., who were ambassadors to England and France for David II. and the early James's, who shed their blood at Flodden Field and Pinkie Cleugh, at Sark and Ancrum Moor, and whose swords were ever ready when their country was in peril ; and so, when he thought of these things, his proud spirit was apt to chafe, and at such times especially he was inclined to view with some contempt his friend Cadbury as a mushroom, being only a peer of yesterday, the second of his race, and for whom not even the ingenuity of the united College of Heralds could "fudge" out a pedigree ; but, for all that, the ample wealth of the latter was not without its due and solid weight in his estimation.

Like more than one old Northern family, the Cheynes of Essilmont were supposed—nay, were confidently alleged—to have a mysterious warning of death or approaching woe, such as the spectre drummer whose beat at Cortachy announces when fate is nigh the "bonnie House of Airlie," like the bell of Coull that tolls of itself when a Dorward dies, the hairy-handed Meg Moulach of the Grants, the headless horseman of Maclean, or the solitary swan that floats on a certain lake at times fatal to another race ; and so the Cheynes of Essilmont were supposed to be haunted by a spectral black hound, in the appearance of which Sir Ranald strove to disbelieve in spite of himself, though its solemn baying had been heard when Ellon died in India and his mother in London ; and as for old Archy Auchindoir, the family factotum, he believed in it as he did in his own existence.

"Original sin," *i.e.*, the accumulated debts of a generation or two past, with his own mad extravagance in youth, had so completely impaired Sir Ranald's exchequer that, on a few hundreds per annum, the wreck of all his fortune, he was com-

pelled, though not content, to live, "vegetate" he deemed it, quietly in an old house in Hampshire; and times there were when in the great weariness of his heart—especially after the death of his two sons—he often thought, could he but see Alison provided for as he wished, he had no other desire than to be laid where many of his ancestors lay, a right which none could deny him, in the ancient chapel of Essilmont, where often he had with envy regarded the stiff and prostrate mailed effigies on their altar tombs, lying there with sword and shield, their faces expressive of stern serenity, and their hands folded in eternal prayer.

Chilcote, his present abode, was buried deep in woods that must have been a portion of the New Forest or the relics thereof, and had been built somewhere about the time of Queen Anne. Thus a great amount of solid oak formed a portion of its structure; and in the principal rooms the mantelpieces ascended in carved work nearly to the ceilings, while the jambs were of massive stone, with caryatides, like the god Terminus, wreathed to the waist in leaves, supporting the entablatures.

The walls were divided into compartments by moulded panelling, painted with imaginary landscapes and ruins; the armorial bearings of the Chilcotes of other days; and beneath the surbase (or chairbelt, as it used to be called), were smaller panels, all painted with fruit and flowers.

The windows were deeply embayed, with cushioned seats. One of these was, in the summer evenings, the favourite niche in which Alison was wont to perch herself with one of Mudie's latest novels.

The furniture was all old, faded, "shabby," Alison truly deemed it; but in tone it seemed much in unison with the rooms, on the walls of which her father had hung a few family pictures, the pride of his heart, gentlemen in ruffs and cloaks, dames in stomachers and capuchins, and two there were in whom he loved to trace a fancied resemblance to his dead sons, Ranald and Ellon, for they were brothers, and bore the same names—Ranald Cheyne, who fell at the head of the Scots Life Guards at Worcester, and Ellon Cheyne, who had died previously at the storming of Newcastle; both men portrayed in the gorgeous costume of their time, and both looked to the life, blue-blooded Scottish cavaliers, pale, smooth-skinned, with moustache and love-lock, haughty and "imperious," and each with an expression of face that seemed to say they would have thought as

little of spitting a crop-eared Roundhead as a lark, with their long Toledoes.

On the day after the hunt Lord Cadbury's groom, Gaskins, came riding to Chilcote with a magnificent bouquet from the conservatories for Alison, and his master's anxious inquiries as to how she had enjoyed the sport of the previous day, and a hope that she had not suffered from fatigue ; and Alison, as she buried her pretty pink nostrils among the cool and fragrant roses, smiled covertly and mischievously as she heard from Gaskins how his master had "got such a precious spill by funking at a bull-finch, when the hounds were thrown off, that he would be confined to the house for some days."

Thus for a time she would be free from the annoyance of his presence.

Archie, the white-haired man-of-all-work, gave Mr. Gaskins a tankard of beer after he had leaped into his saddle, where he took what Archie called a "standing drink, like the coo o' Forfar." Lord Cadbury's powdered servants, in elaborate liveries, were always a source of supreme contempt (mingled, perhaps, with envy) to Sir Ranald's staunch henchman, and now he felt inclined to sneer if he could at the well-appointed groom, in his dark-gray surtout, waistbelt, cockade, and top-boots.

"Braw leathers, thae o' yours," said he, regarding the latter with some interest.

"Yaas," drawled Gaskins. "I flatter myself that few gents appear with better boot tops than Cadbury and myself. I clean them with a preparation—quite a conserve, Mr. Hackendore, peculiarly my own."

"And what may that be?" asked Archie.

"Champagne and apricot jam," replied Gaskins, twirling his moustache and eyeing the old man with intense superciliousness.

"Set ye up, indeed, wi' your buits and belts!" snapped Archie. "Ye think yoursel' made for the siller ; but a bawbee cat may look at a king."

"I don't understand the sense of your remark," drawled Gaskins, shortening his reins.

"Like enough—like enough ; mony complain o' want o' siller, but few complain o' want o' sense ; and a gowk at Yule will ne'er be bricht at Beltane."

"What the devil is he talking about?" thought the

bewildered groom, as he put spurs to his horse and trotted away.

"Wi' a' his bravery," said Archie, with a grimace, "he's a loon that will loup the dyke where it's laigest."

Alison divided the bouquet into portions for various vases to ornament her drawing-room, and on the following day, after a more than usually careful toilette, while her father was occupied in worry and perplexity over letters and accounts, seated herself in the deep bay of a window that overlooked the avenue, her heart beating quicker as the noon wore on.

She had a novel in her hand, but we doubt if she knew even the title of it. Pleasure, doubt, and anxiety were mingling in the girl's mind—pleasure, as she thought, "I shall see him again for a time, however brief!"—doubt of what might ensue if she saw him under the keen watchful eyes of her father, who could detect every expression of her face, and a great anxiety lest she might be requested to avoid all intimacy, even acquaintanceship, with Bevil Goring in future; but little could she foresee the turn matters were to take, or the events of the next few days.

Luncheon was long past, and the afternoon was drawing on, when Goring rode down the avenue and gave the bridle of his horse to Archie Auchindoir, who, with a considerable appearance of being flustered, had—on the approach of a visitor—hurried from the garden, where he had been at work, to don an old black claw-hammer coat, the reversion of Sir Ranald's wardrobe.

He ran the bridle rein deftly through an iron ring in the ivy-covered porch, and preceded the young officer, whose card he placed on a silver tray with as much formality as if the little mansion of Chilcote had been a residence like Buckingham Palace.

Sir Ranald bade him welcome with finished courtesy and old-fashioned grace, while Alison, her cheek mantling with ill-concealed pleasure—for what young girl but feels her pulses quicken in the presence of a handsome and welcome admirer—continued to keep her back to the windows; thus, during the usual exchange of commonplaces and inquiries, Sir Ranald, who watched both, failed to detect anything in the manner of either that could lead to the inference that they had more interest in each other than ordinary acquaintances, and began to feel rather grateful to the young officer who had come to do them a kindness.

"So glad to see you again, Captain Goring, and to thank you for your care of Miss Cheyne when with the hounds," he said, motioning their visitor to a seat. "The cavalier to whom I entrusted her, Lord Cadbury, seems to have come to grief at his first fence," added the old gentleman, laughing over the mishap of his friend, to whom Goring would rather that no reference had been made.

"I promised to call, Sir Ranald, and inquire for Miss Cheyne, after our pretty rough run, especially by Burnham Beeches, where the pack hunted their game pretty hard," said Goring, "and also to beg her acceptance of a relic of your son Ellon, of the Hussars, of which I became possessed by the merest chance in India."

"A thousand thanks. Most kind of you, Captain Goring," said Sir Ranald, his usually pale cheek reddening for a moment.

"I learned incidentally from Miss Cheyne, as we rode towards Chilcote, that the poor lad who was killed at Lahore was her younger brother, and that the ring I possess had been his. It is here," he added, opening a tiny morocco box, in which he had placed the ring.

It was a richly-chased trinket, having two clam-shells of gold, with a diamond in the centre of each.

"Ellon's ring it is, indeed," exclaimed Sir Ranald, in a changed voice, while the moisture clouded the glasses of his *pince-nez*.

"My farewell gift to him on the morning he marched from Maidstone—you remember, papa," exclaimed Alison, with tears in her voice.

"I am not likely to forget, God help me, that both my boys are gone, and now I have——"

"Only me, papa."

"It is a source of supreme satisfaction that I am the means of restoring this to his family," Goring added, judiciously, as he was on the point of saying "sister," and he placed it in her hand; but that hand seemed so slim and white and beautiful that he was tempted to do more, for he slipped the ring rather playfully and rather nervously on one of her fingers, saying: "It is a world too wide."

"Of course," said Sir Ranald, "it is a man's ring."

"But, see!" exclaimed Alison, as she pressed a spring, of the existence of which Goring had been until that moment

ignorant, and the two clam-shells unclosing showed a minutely and beautifully coloured little photo, no larger than a shilling, of her own charming face.

"Good heavens!" said Goring, with genuine surprise and pleasure, "I was all unaware of this secret, though I have worn the ring for two years and more."

"And all that time you have been wearing *my* ring, *my* hair, *my* likeness," muttered Alison, in a low voice, while Sir Ranald was ringing the bell.

"Delicious fatality," thought Goring, as he looked on the sweet flushed face that was upturned to his, and their eyes met in a mutual glance that expressed more than their lips dared tell already, and which neither ever forgot. Luckily at that moment the baronet, on hospitable thoughts intent, was ordering Archie to bring wine, mentioning a rare brand from the small store which yet remained of the wreck of better days—a store kept for visitors alone.

"My brothers died within a month of each other in India, Captain Goring," said Alison. "Poor mamma never got over the double shock, and—and—we have never been at Essilmont since."

"Could not your presence, your existence console her?" asked Goring.

"No; her soul was centred in her boys."

"I shall never forget your kindness, Captain Goring, in bringing us this little relic of Ellon," said Sir Ranald; "and now after your ride from the camp try a glass of this white *Clos Vougeot*. But perhaps you would prefer red. We have both, I think, Archie?"

Though the last bottle of the red sparkling Burgundy had long since vanished, Archie vowed there was a binful, and fortunately for his veracity Goring announced a decided preference for the white; and while Alison played dreamily with her brother's ring, and thought again and again how strange it was that her hair and her likeness should have been worn with it for so long in far and distant lands by Bevil Goring, the conversation turned to general subjects between the latter and her father, who came secretly to the conclusion that he "was a very fine young fellow."

He had seen the last on earth of Ellon, had stood by his grave, had seen the smoke of the death volleys curling over it, and seen it covered up; thus Alison thought he was more to

her than any mere stranger could ever be, and already, in her heart, she had begun to deem him more indeed.

And after he had taken his departure, when she offered the ring to Sir Ranald, to her joy, he begged her to retain it, and, much to her surprise, answered that he meant to have a little dinner party.

"You quite take my heart away, papa—a dinner party!" exclaimed Alison.

"Yes, we shall have this young fellow Goring (he asked me to dine at his mess, you know), and his brother officers Dalton and Wilmot, Cadbury of course, and you can have Mrs. Trelawney, who is always charming company, to keep you in countenance—a nice little party."

"Oh, papa," exclaimed Alison, in genuine dismay, "think of our poor *ménage*."

"Tut—consult Mrs. Prune on the subject."

"I thought you wished to have a rest from dinner parties."

"I have been at so many, that some return——"

"Yes—but—but, papa——"

"What next, child?"

"Our last quarter's bills were so large," urged Alison.

"Large for our exchequer, I have no doubt."

"Let us call it luncheon, papa, and I think I shall arrange it nicely," she pleaded, her heart quickening at the chance of meeting Bevil (she already thought of him as "Bevil") again. So that was decided on, and the invitation notes were quickly despatched.

Alison had watched from a window the shadow of their visitor, as that of man and horse lengthened out on the sun-lighted road, until shadow and form passed away; but Goring, as he rode homeward, was little aware that he had not seen the *last* of Ellon Cheyne's ring.

CHAPTER IV.

LAURA TRELAWNEY.

THE invited guests all responded, and accepted almost by return of post, and a sigh of relief escaped Sir Ranald when he found no missives came with them, as he was generally well pleased when he saw the village postman pass the avenue gate.

"Captain Goring, I see, uses sealing-wax—good custom—good old style," said he, returning that officer's note to Alison, who prized it rather more than he knew; "uses a shield too—the chevron and annulets of the Gorings of Sussex—not a crest; every trumpery fellow sticks one on his notepaper now—the crest that never shone on a helmet."

So, from this circumstance, Bevil Goring rose in the estimation of the baronet, who knew all Burke's Armory by rote.

The luncheon lay heavy on poor Alison's heart; she thought of their *cuisine*, as it too often was—refined and dainty though her father's tastes were—meat roasted dubiously, then made up into stews and lumpy minces, with rice puddings, and she shivered with dismay, and had long and deep consultations with old Mrs. Rebecca Prune and her daughter Daisy; but when the day came her fears were ended, and she began "to see her way," as she said, and contemplated the table with some complacency.

In her blue morning robe, trimmed with white, which suited so well her complexion and the character of her beauty, she was cutting and placing in crystal vases the monthly roses and few meagre flowers with fern leaves from her tiny conservatory at the sunny end of the house to decorate the table.

"Don't they look pretty, papa?" she exclaimed, almost gleefully.

"Yes, but you, pet Alison, are the sweetest flower of them all," said Sir Ranald, kissing the close white division of her rich brown hair.

"'Dawted dochters mak' daidling wives,' they say," muttered old Archie, who was busy polishing a salver; "but our dear doo, Miss Alison, will never be ane o' them, Sir Ranald."

For the honour of the house, Archie had been most anxious to furnish his quota to the feast, and said:

"Miss Alison, I am sure I would catch ye some troots in the burn owre by, though the weeds ha'e grown sae in the water, if you would like them."

"Thanks, Archie, you old dear," replied Alison, laughing, "but we won't require them."

The cold salmon and fowls, the salads, some game, the grapes, and other etceteras of a well-appointed repast, to which delicate cutlets were to be added, with some of Sir Ranald's irreproachable wines—almost the last remnants of a well-stocked cellar—made the table complete, and Alison content;

nor must we forget the dainty china and crested silver dishes, heirlooms for generations back, which were brought from their repositories, and were the pride of old Auchindoir's heart and of his master's too.

The chief of these was a relic of considerable antiquity, being nothing less than a maizer, or goblet of silver, bequeathed by Elizabeth, Queen Consort of Scotland, to her master of the household, the Laird of Essilmont, who, with Douglas, pursued Edward of England from Bannockburn to the gates of Dunbar, and which had emblazoned (in faded colours) and graven on in the Cheyne arms, chequy *or* and *azure*, a fess gules, fretty of the first, and crested with a buck's head, erased.

Mrs. Trelawney and her little daughter were the first to arrive. She swept up to Alison, kissed her on both cheeks, with more genuine affection than effusiveness, and apologised for the presence of her little companion.

"I knew you would pardon me bringing the poor child. She has no one to love but me, and mopes so much when left alone."

"Netty, I hope, loves me too," exclaimed Alison, taking the girl—a bright little thing of some eight years or so, with a shower of clustering curls—in her arms and kissing her fondly. "I don't think papa would consider his little entertainment complete without Netty to prattle to him."

Mrs. Trelawney, a brilliant blonde of seven-and-twenty, though a widow, looked almost girlish for her years; her figure was tall and eminently handsome; her white-lidded and long-lashed hazel eyes were full of brilliant expression; her manner was vivacious, and every action of her hands and head graceful in the extreme. She formed an attractive and leading feature in every circle, and usually was the centre of a group of gentlemen everywhere, and yet, singular to say, she rather avoided than courted both notice and society.

When she talked she seemed the art of pleasing personified; her words, her gestures, her bright eyes, and beautiful lips were all prepossessing.

She would invest petty trifles with interest; her accents were those of grace, and she could polish the point of an epigram, or say even a bold thing, better certainly than any other woman Alison had ever met. Her vivacity was said to approach folly; but even in her moments of folly, she was always interesting.

On the other hand she had times of depression almost amounting to gloom, most singular even to those who knew her best, and it was averred that, though not very rich, she had refused many eligible offers, and preferred the perfect freedom of widowhood.

"And now, dear," she said, as she took an accustomed seat in the drawing-room, "tell me all who are coming."

"Well, there is Lord Cadbury."

"Of course."

"And Captain Goring."

"Of course," said the pretty widow, fanning herself, though a crystal screen was between her and the fire.

"Why of course?" asked Alison, colouring; "and there is Jerry Wilmot—your devoted—and Captain Dalton, who will be sure to fall in love with you."

At Dalton's name Mrs. Trelawney changed colour; indeed she grew so perceptibly pale, while her lips quivered, that Alison remarked it.

"Dearest, what agitates you so? Do you know him?" asked the girl.

"No—not at all!"

"What then——"

"I knew one of the same name who did me—let me rather say—my family—a great wrong."

"But he cannot be the same person."

"Oh, no. Besides, this Captain Dalton has just come from India with his regiment. And so you think he will be sure to fall in love with me?" added Mrs. Trelawney, recovering her colour and her smiles; "and I with him perhaps."

"That does not follow; but he seems just the kind of man I think a widow might fall in love with—handsome and manly, grave, earnest, and sympathetic."

"But he may share in the aversion of Mr. Weller, senior, and have his tendency to beware of widows. I feel certain, Alison dear, that your Captain Dalton will never suit me."

"You have seen him then?"

"Yes—with the buckhounds the other day."

"Wilmot, who admires you so much, will one day be very rich, they say."

"Don't talk thus, Alison, or I shall begin to deem you what I know you are not—mercenary; but Jerry Wilmot has little

just now ; he has, however, a knowledge of horseflesh and a great capability for spending money, and thinks a pack of hounds in a hunting country is necessary to existence. He is a detrimental of the first water, and the special *bête noire* of Belgravian and Tyburnian mammas."

"It is a pity you should ever seclude yourself as you sometimes do, Laura," said Alison, looking at her beautiful friend with genuine admiration ; "all men admire you so much, and you have but to hold up your little finger to make them kneel at your feet."

"How you flatter me ! But I never will hold up my little finger, nor would I marry again for the mines of Potosi and Peru. It is as well that little Netty is so busy with that photographic album, or she might marvel at your anxiety to provide her with a papa."

"It is not wealth you wait for ?"

"No."

"What then, Laura ?"

"Nothing."

"How I shall laugh if the handsome Captain Dalton stirs that now unimpressible heart of yours."

"I shall be very glad to meet him," said Mrs. Trelawney, with a curious hardness in her voice.

"Why ?"

"Because I may compel him to love me, Alison," and as Mrs. Trelawney spoke her eyes flashed with a triumphant glow such as Alison had never seen in them before.

"Compel him ?"

"Yes."

"It would be easy to make him love you ; but would you marry him ?"

"How your little head runs on love and marriage ! No, Alison, I shall never marry—*again* !"

"Poor soul," thought Alison, admiringly, "how much she must have loved her first husband !"

And simultaneously with the entrance of Sir Ranald, the three brother officers—Bevil Goring, Jerry Wilmot, and Captain Dalton—were announced, and all these were men of the best style, in accurate morning costume, all more than usually good-looking, set up by drill, easy in bearing, and looking ruddy with their ride from the camp on a chill October day.

"I missed you early in the hunt, Miss Cheyne," said Jerry,

after the introductions were over. "How you and Goring flew over that first fence!"

"I love to gallop over everything," replied Alison, "but I must confess that my sympathies in the field are always with the flying stag, or the poor little panting hare—a miserable, tiny creature, with a horde of men, horses, and dogs after it, and making the welkin ring when in at the death!"

"Yes, though by the way I never know precisely what the said welkin is, unless it be the regions of the air."

All unaware that his name had been so recently and so curiously on her lovely lips, Captain, or Tony Dalton, as his comrades called him, was saying some commonplaces to Mrs. Trelawney, over whose chair he was stooping.

He was not much her senior perhaps in years, but he had seen much of service in India. Tall and dark, with closely-shorn brown hair, he had an air and face that were commanding; but with a simple grace of bearing that belied any appearance of self-assertion.

After India, where he had been long on a station up country; where all the Europeans were males, and not a lady within three hundred miles; where a wet towel and half a water-melon formed the morning head-dress, and visits of the water-carrier incessant; where books were scarce, serials scarcer, flies and heat plentiful; and where the little tawny women, with their nose-rings and orange-coloured cheeks, were all alike hideous—to see such a woman as Mrs. Trelawney, with her snowy skin, her shell-like ears, and marvellous hands, was something indeed.

She was dressed in rich dark silk—not mourning; she wore no widow's cap, but had her fine hair simply braided in a heavy and beautiful coil at the back of her handsome head, and she looked as fair and lovely as she must have done on her marriage morning.

Bevil Goring had begun to address Alison, whose sweet eyes were shyly upturned to his as she placed in the bosom of her dress a rosebud he had taken from the lapel of his coat, when the deep Doric voice of Archie Auchindoir was heard announcing the *bête noire* of both.

"Lord Cawdbury."

CHAPTER V.

ALISON'S LUNCHEON PARTY.

A MAN, between fifty and sixty years of age, having a short, paunchy, and ungainly figure, grizzled hair, ferret-like eyes with a cunning unscrupulous expression, and a long heavy moustache which was almost white, entered with a smiling face and an easy and well-assured air that was born, not of innate good breeding, but of the supreme confidence given by position and a well-stocked purse.

Coarse and large hands and ears, with an over-display of jewellery, especially two or three gold-digger-like rings, showed that, though the second peer of his family, Lord Cadbury was of very humble origin indeed.

His face wore its brightest smile as he greeted his hostess, Alison, and under his white moustache showed the remainder of a set of teeth that, as Jerry Wilmot said afterwards, were like the remnants of the old Guard, "few in number and very much the worse for wear."

He shook the slender hand of Sir Ranald with considerable cordiality, yet not without an air of patronage, bowed over Mrs. Trelawney's gloved fingers, nodded slightly to the three officers (Cadbury did not like military men), and, seating himself by Alison's side, banteringly accused her of running away at Salthill and leaving him behind (he did not say in the ditch), which was precisely what she did do; nor did she attempt to excuse herself, but simply rose and took his arm when Archie announced the luncheon was ready, and, the moment he seated himself, the peer began to expatiate upon the improvements he was making at Cadbury Court, for behoof of the table generally, though his remarks were made especially to her; but she heard with indifference a description of the vineries, pineries, and so forth, which he was erecting at a vast cost.

Not so her father, who, with the *pince-nez* balanced on his aristocratic nose, heard of these things with a face which wore a curiously mingled expression of satisfaction and contempt; for he failed not to recognise a tone of vulgar ostentation that seemed so well to suit, he thought, "the tradesman's coronet of yesterday," and endeavoured to turn the conversation to hunting, though his days for it were passed.

"The world changes, and has changed in many things, Captain Dalton," said he; "but true to his own instincts man will always be a huntsman and a soldier."

"But to uncant a tame deer, or let a hare out of a bag, and then pursue it with a horse and dog as if one's life depended upon the recapture, scarcely seems a sane proceeding," said Lord Cadbury, who still felt the effects of his "spill" in the field, "and all unsuited to this age of refinement."

"I believe only in the refinement that is produced by the education of generations," said Sir Ranald, a little irrelevantly, as he tugged his white moustache and felt himself unable to repress a covert sneer at the very man for whom he had destined Alison, with whom the peer was too much occupied to hear what was said.

With all her regard and esteem for old Archie Auchindoir, Alison was rather bored by the bewilderment of Goring and others, on whom he was in attendance, at his quaintness, oddity, and unintelligible dialect; and sooth to say, all undeterred by rank and wealth, he was very inattentive and curt to Lord Cadbury, of whose views he was no more ignorant than most servants usually are of their superior's affairs.

Thus many a grimace stole over his wrinkled and saturnine visage as he watched the pair, and muttered, as he carved game at the sideboard:

"It is a braw thing to be lo'ed, nae doubt, but wha wad mool wi' an auld moudiewart like that? No our Miss Alison, certes."

On the strength of his wealth and rank, of many a pretty present forced upon her unwillingly, yet with her father's consent, and curiously enough upon his great seniority to her in years, which enabled him "to do the paternal," as Mrs. Trelawney once said, Lord Cadbury assumed a kind of right of proprietary in Alison Cheyne that was very galling to the latter before her guests, and under the sense of which Bevil Goring chafed in secret as he drank his wine in silence and gnawed his moustache in sheer anger, for Alison was fast becoming to him more than he might ever dare acknowledge to herself.

"You must have married when very young, Mrs. Trelawney," said Dalton, who was plying her daughter with grapes and crystallised fruits.

"Yes—I was just seventeen."

"It is so romantic to marry young."

"Too romantic perhaps to be either a sensible or a practical proceeding," said Mrs. Trelawney, her slender fingers contrasting in their whiteness with the deep crimson of her claret glass; "but there is only one thing else better than marrying young."

"And that is——"

"To die young, Captain Dalton!" she said laughingly, yet with a curious flash in her soft hazel eyes.

"Like those whom the gods love?"

"Yes."

Dalton knew not what to make of these strange speeches, but after a time he began to see that she was rather given to indulging in wild and even bitter ones, yet all said laughingly; and he rapidly began to regard her as a species of beautiful enigma.

To Alison it became apparent that a sudden change had come over her friend Laura at the first sight of Captain Dalton; she had grown pale and silent, and even *distract*—so much so that Alison had whispered to her:

"Does he remind you of anyone?"

"Yes," she had replied.

"Of whom?"

"Pardon me."

"She is thinking of her dead husband, no doubt. Dear me, if this should prove a case!" thought the little matchmaker, who saw that as the luncheon proceeded Mrs. Trelawney was all gaiety, smiles, and brilliance, and too evidently leaving nothing undone by sallies of wit to fascinate Dalton; and Alison felt grateful to her that by her gaiety she had made the little luncheon quite a success, as she felt it to have been when all returned to the drawing-room to have some music.

"Now, Laura dear," said she, "we all look to you first," and Dalton led the widow to the piano, and she began to play readily with great brilliancy, force, and execution some very rare and difficult pieces of music, while he stood by and turned over the leaves; and when pressed to sing, she began at once a little ballad, the words of which were curious, and went to a singularly slow, sad, and wailing air:

"Think not of me in summer's blush,
When flowers around thee spring,
And warbling birds on every bush
Their sweetest music sing."

Think not of me, when winter stern
His icy throne uprears,
And long lost friends with joy return,
To tell of other years.

“But when the sighing breezes own
Sad autumn's blighting sway,
And withered flowers and leaves are strewn,
In silence o'er thy way;
Then think of me! for withered lies
The dearest hope I nursed;
And I have seen, with bitter sighs,
My brightest dream dispersed.”

Other verses—of which these are a sample—followed, and her voice, tender, plaintive, half passionate, and somewhat piteous, gave a powerful effect to the words, to which Tony Dalton seemed to listen like a man in a dream as he hung over her.

“Oh, Laura,” exclaimed Alison, hurrying to her side, with a merry little laugh, “that melodramatic ditty is most unlike you. Where, in the name of goodness, did you pick it up?”

“I have heard that song long, long ago, Mrs. Trelawney,” said Captain Dalton, trying to pull himself together.

“When?” asked the singer, turning her eyes upon him with one of their most effective glances under lashes long and dark.

“I cannot say,” replied the officer; “but I have heard these verses sung by a voice so like yours that I am bewildered.”

“Was it in a dream?” she asked softly.

“Perhaps.”

“I found them in an old album, in which they were written by a friend years ago.”

“What friend?” asked Dalton, almost mechanically.

“That matters little now, nor could it interest you.”

“It does—it does, because I knew that song well years ago, as you say.”

Her eyelashes quivered, even her hands trembled with some real or perhaps pretended emotion, and she cut short the subject by dashing at once into a piece of Verdi's music, and by her brilliancy and sparkle she seemed to be absorbing Dalton entirely now, greatly to the dismay of Jerry, who was one of her bondsmen.

Mrs. Trelawney, who had undoubtedly been studying the former, saw that he was in many ways an interesting man, whose

face and bearing indicated that he had seen much of the world, much of human life, and done all that a soldier might do in it—that there was at times something of restlessness and impatience in his eyes and on his lips, as of a man who had a secret, the clue to which she was curious to find.

When Alison took her place at the piano, where Goring posted himself on duty to turn the leaves (old Lord Cadbury knew not a note of music luckily), Mrs. Trelawney drew her daughter towards her, and said :

“This is my little girl, Captain Dalton. Give your hand, child.”

The latter, a very little girl indeed—quite a small lady—gave her tiny hand to Dalton, who looked into her shy eyes earnestly, and then said, with a bright smile :

“How singular that she is not like you !”

“No—she is dark-complexioned.”

“And you are almost blonde, though your eyes are hazel. I presume she resembles her father ?”

“She does in many points—in others I hope she never will,” added Mrs. Trelawney, in her heart.

“Is it long since she lost him ?” asked Dalton softly.

“She never knew him.”

“How ?”

“Fate took him from me before she was born.”

“Poor child !” said Dalton, caressing the girl’s soft and silky hair, while her tiny fingers toyed with a ring he wore ; “she is quite a little beauty, but she could not fail to be so.”

“You are pleased to be complimentary, Captain Dalton,” said Mrs. Trelawney, who seemed more pleased with his admiration of the child than of herself, and a little sigh escaped her.

There was now, as when she sang, a great tenderness in her voice, a kind of plaintive ring in it that stirred Dalton’s heart curiously, and when she asked him question upon question, with a considerable depth of interest, as to the places he had seen, the adventures that had befallen him, the battles in which he had shared, and so forth, he found himself gradually unfolding to her all his past interests, his present plans, his future hopes—if, indeed, he had any ; while she listened with her inquiring eyes, half-veiled by their drooping lids, fixed on his, her bosom heaving, and a white hand swaying her feather fan mechanically to and fro.

"And now tell me, Captain Dalton," said she suddenly, as he paused; "but you will think me very curious—in all these years of military wandering, how you never thought of marriage?"

"A strange question!" said he.

"And a leading one, you may think," she resumed, laughing merrily; "but we widows are privileged people—well?"

"Never!" said he, in a low, husky voice, and through the bronze the Indian sun had cast upon his cheek, she could see the scarlet blush that mantled there, and, rather shrinking from the turn their conversation had taken, he drew back, and his place was instantly assumed by Jerry Wilmot, who plunged at once into a conversation, which he conducted in a low and confidential tone, while playing with her fan, of which he had possessed himself.

Jerry Wilmot was eminently a handsome fellow. From his well set-up soldierly head to his slender well-moulded feet no fault could be found with him; but though his manner and conversation were full of that subtle flattery and earnestness which, if it does not make its way to a woman's heart, at least appeals to her vanity, he made no progress apparently with Mrs. Trelawney, who on this occasion listened to him with less patience than usual, and without even her generally amused smile.

"Are all men precisely alike to you?" whispered Jerry.

"In the main they are."

"This evening, too?"

"Yes—decidedly so," she replied, with a side glance.

"Now please give me my fan, Jerry, and don't break it, as you so often do."

CHAPTER VI.

"THE OLD, OLD STORY."

ON this afternoon Alison felt, with pleasant confidence, that she was "looking her best," dressed to perfection, and had been equal to the occasion. She wore a closely-fitting costume of lustreless black silk, edged everywhere with rare old white lace that had been her mother's; her hair appeared more golden than brown in the sunshine, while seeming to retain the latter in its silky coils.

Round her slender neck was a collarette of soft, filmy white lace, and in it was a Provence rose, which Lord Cadbury had not been slow to detect as one from his own bouquet, and gathered some hope therefrom, as Bevil Goring did from her wearing his rosebud.

As she stood in the deep bay of one of the old windows, with the full flood of the ruddy afternoon sun streaming upon her, she made a charming picture, and there Goring joined her, while the rest were all engaged in general conversation. He was already feeling that to be near her was happiness, and that to see her, even across a table, was a thousand degrees better than not seeing her at all.

And she—brief though their acquaintance was—had become conscious of a quicker beating of her pulse, an undefinable sense of pleasure pervading her whole form, a mantling of colour in her cheek when he approached or spoke to her. Little had as yet passed between them; but the tell-tale eyes had told much.

“What a wonderful vista of old beech-trees!” said Goring, referring to the view from the windows.

“And the distant village spire closes it so prettily,” she replied; “but you cannot see it properly from this point—but from that little terrace.”

“May we step out?”

“Oh, yes.”

She tried to open the window, a French one, which opened to the floor within and to a couple of stone steps without.

“Allow me,” murmured Goring, and as he drew back the latch his fingers closed for a moment over hers.

They were only friends—he was only a visitor—why should she not show him the view, or anything else that interested him? She took a Shetland shawl from a chair close by, threw it over her head, and, gathering the soft folds under her pretty chin in a hand that was white as a rosebud, passed out with him upon the little terrace that overlooked her garden.

“And so that is Chilcote Church?”

“Yes, Captain Goring—an old edifice—old, they say, as the time of Edward the Elder. It is covered with ivy, and is a capital subject to sketch.”

“And is this building here, with the eaves, your stable?”

“Oh, no—we have no stables; but it is the scene of my peculiar care,” replied Alison, laughing.

“Indeed!”

"My hen-house."

And, with all his growing admiration of her, the fashionable young officer almost laughed when his charming companion showed him her hen-houses—her beautiful Hamburgs, Dorkings, and their clutches of Cochin-China chickens.

"Do you like bees?" she asked.

"No—they sting, you know; but I don't object to the honey."

So she showed him her hives, as if Goring had never seen such things before; and so on by the duck-pond, and round the old-fashioned house, with its heavy eaves, dormer windows, and masses of ivy, and he could only think what a picturesque background it made to the central figure of his lovely companion, who, sooth to say, in the pleasure of his society, forgot all about her other guests; or, if she did think, she knew that Mrs. Trelawney could amuse them all.

To Bevil Goring, Alison was quite unlike any other girl he had met, she seemed so highly bred, and yet withal so natural. There seemed to be an originality about her that piqued his fancy, while her freshness of heart was charming; and she often showed a depth of thought and consideration—born perhaps of her family troubles and surroundings—that surprised and interested him. More than all did her grace and beauty bewilder him; and after this, amid the routine of duty at Aldershot, and during many a dusty day of drill in the Long Valley, he could only think of her image, her soft laughter, and the sweet, varying expression of her grey-blue eyes.

"With what pathos Mrs. Trelawney sang!" said Goring, as after their little promenade they drew near the French window again.

"Yes; one might have thought she was singing that queer song of herself. There seemed somehow a kind of wail in it, as if it came from the heart. But we must go in now."

"One moment yet," said he, pausing and almost touching her hand; "I am so happy to be alone with you that I grudge every opportunity you give to others."

"It is very good of you to say so," replied Alison to this rather confused remark, as their eyes met with a mutual glance neither could mistake nor ever forget; "but the evening has become very chilly."

And, with this commonplace remark, while her heart was beating wildly with new, delicious, and hitherto unknown

emotions that made her cheek glow and then grow very pale, Alison entered the room as Bevil Goring opened and reclosed the French window.

From that moment she knew that Bevil loved her ; his eyes had told her so, and young as she was, Alison was able to read his confession in them.

Now Sir Ranald had missed the pair from the drawing-room during the few minutes they had been absent, and drew his own conclusions therefrom, but not so Lord Cadbury, who had as yet no jealousy ; nor could he dream that any commoner or poorer person could enter into a competition with him for anything, assured as he was, in an absurd degree, of the overwhelming influence of his own rank and his own money, which hitherto had always procured him whatever he had a fancy for.

When Mrs. Trelawney's carriage was announced by Archie, and that lady was being shawled previous to her departure, she made Alison grow pale with annoyance by whispering as she kissed her :

" I hope, darling, you have not been making a fool of yourself ? "

" How ? "

" Young as you are, you are certainly old enough to know what officers are ! "

" I do not understand you, Laura—what are they ? "

" The greatest flirts in the world. "

" Have you found them so ? "

" I have had more experience of them than I ever care to have again, " said she bitterly. " Good-bye, Captain Dalton, " she exclaimed, presenting her hand to the tall, dark officer who had been regarding her attentively¹

" Rather let us say *au revoir*, " said he, bowing. " I have with me at the camp a necklace of Champac beads which I brought from India, and I have just promised them to your daughter ; if you will permit me to send—or to call—— "

" We shall be so happy to see you—but you are too kind, and are you not depriving some other little or fairer friend—— "

" No, Mrs. Trelawney ; I have scarcely a lady friend in the world now, " said he, laughing, though his speech seemed a grave one.

A few minutes after and the little party had separated ; Lord Cadbury remained behind, to the intense annoyance of Goring, who, with his two companions, went back to the

camp at a canter to be in time for mess ; and while Sir Ranald—Cadbury's senior by some fifteen years—dozed and slept after dinner in his easy chair, Alison, till she was weary and well-nigh desperate, had to undergo the prolonged visit, the society and the unconcealed tenderness, or would-be love-making of her odious old admirer.

When Alison retired that night, Bevil's rosebud was carefully placed in a flower glass upon her toilette table, while Cadbury's Provence rose was left to repose in the coal-scuttle ; and Bevil Goring, in his hut in the infantry lines—a hut in which he chummed with Jerry Wilmot—lay awake far into the hours of the morning, till the cannon announcing dawn boomed from Gun Hill over the sleeping camp, thinking again and again of the little promenade round the old house at Chilcote, the eyes that had looked so sweetly into his ; of the little he had hinted—still more of the vast amount he had left unsaid, and marvelling when again he should see Alison Cheyne.

The fact is that Bevil Goring was very much in love—certainly more than he had ever been in his life before, and frankly confessed to himself that he had been "hit at last, and hit very hard indeed."

Thus it may be imagined how much he felt stung when next morning at breakfast, while the trio were talking of the day before, Dalton said, quite unwittingly :

"Mrs. Trelawney assured me that it is almost completely arranged that Miss Cheyne is to become the wife of Lord Cadbury, who can make a princely settlement upon her ; while her father is, we all know, so poor."

"What selfishness—what sacrilege !" exclaimed Jerry, slashing the top off an egg, "to sacrifice her to that old duffer !"

"For her father's sake I have little doubt the girl will comply—she seems of a most affectionate nature."

Bevil Goring sat silent ; but these remarks sank deeply into his heart.

"Does Mrs. Trelawney approve of these arrangements ?" asked Jerry, after a pause.

"I cannot say—but I should rather think not."

"To me she seems to have been singularly unhappy in her short married life."

"What makes you think so ?"

"I scarcely know—but feel certain that I am right."

"Now wouldn't you like very much to console her, Jerry?"

"You are the last man, Tony, in whom I would confide concerning the fair widow," said Jerry, angrily; "but there goes the bugle for parade, and, by Jove, our fellows are falling in!"

"When her hair is grey—if it ever becomes grey—and all her youth is gone, that woman will still be beautiful," exclaimed Dalton, with enthusiasm.

Mrs. Trelawney was wont to drive over every other day when the weather was fine and take Alison—she knew the lonely life the girl led—away with her to afternoon tea, to lawn tennis at the Vicarage or elsewhere, or drive by Farnborough and Aldershot Camp. And, with reference to future points in our story, we may add that this sprightly lady resided at Chilcote Grange, a pretty modern villa about a mile distant from the mansion of Sir Ranald, whither she had recently come after a long sojourn abroad, or in the Channel Islands, as some said, for no one knew precisely about her antecedents.

Notwithstanding all her real, or pretended, aversion to matrimony, and love of that freedom which the demise of "the late lamented Trelawney" seemed to have given her, the handsome widow, by more than one mutual invitation to her "afternoon teas," &c., unknown to Sir Ranald and Lord Cadbury, gave Bevil Goring an opportunity of meeting Alison Cheyne which he might not have otherwise enjoyed.

Alison had read of love and thought of it (as what young girl does not?), and Bevil Goring seemed to her the beau-ideal of all she had pictured in her imagination a lover or a husband ought to be. True it is, this idea might be born of his undoubted fancy for herself, and the impulsive nature of Alison forbade her to love or do anything else by halves.

Already she thought of him and spoke of him to herself as "Bevil," and then paused and blushed at the conviction that she did so. But then was not the name a quaint and strange one?

Dalton had called at Chilcote Grange and left his card; the widow was from home, and, as he did not leave the gift he had promised her little daughter, she smiled, as she well knew that he meant to call again.

"Laura," said Alison, as she saw the card, "I am certain that Captain Dalton admires you—nay, loves you, from what

Bevil—I mean Captain Goring—tells me. He talks of you incessantly."

"Yet he has only seen me once or twice."

"Quite enough to achieve that end."

"How, child?"

"You are so very beautiful," said Alison, patting the widow's cheek playfully.

"How strange that you should say so!"

"Why strange?"

"I mean that one woman should so much admire another. Had you been a man it might be natural enough, and understandable too."

"But why not a woman?" persisted Alison.

"Women are often too petty—too jealous generally of each other; but you are a dear pet, Alison, and admire those whom you love. As for Dalton, he has seen so little of me—here at least."

"What! has he met you *elsewhere*?" asked Alison, quickly.

"No; I have not said so," replied Mrs. Trelawney, colouring deeply for a moment.

"But your words seem to imply this, Laura."

"They implied nothing—I scarcely know what I said; but as for praising me, Alison," said Mrs. Trelawney, to turn the conversation apparently, "you can well afford to do so; but if I were to be denuded of my borrowed plumes, my gay dresses, and general make-up, I might cut a sorry figure perhaps, while you in the bloom of your girlhood——"

"Require all that bloom, Laura. If my good looks, and the impression they may make, depended on all the finery poor papa can give me, I should cut but a sorry figure too."

Then both laughed as they turned to the mirror above the mantelpiece, that reflected two faces, which, though different in style, contour, and colour, were both lovely indeed, and the owners thereof felt that they were so.

From thenceforward no solicitation could prevail upon Alison Cheyne to ride one of Lord Cadbury's horses again, passionately as she loved equestrian exercise; and her persistent refusal greatly puzzled the amorous peer, and annoyed Sir Ranald.

Two longings grew strong in the girl's heart—one to be rich and independent of all monetary considerations, as her family once was; the other, that her father would moderate

his ambition to their present circumstances, and cease repining ; but pride made him revolt against them, as not being the inevitable, while she had—as he thought—a well-gilded coronet lying at her feet.

As to any secret fancies Alison might have, or her “chance-medley” friend Captain Goring either, he barely gave them a minute’s consideration, as being too preposterous, if indeed he considered them at all.

Goring had no one to consult or regard—father, nor mother, nor brother ; he was alone in the world now, and the entire master of his own means, if somewhat slender, and he longed now indeed for someone to love, and love him in return.

He brooded over the past, and it *was* a strange coincidence that he should have worn for so long a time, in that far-away land of the sun, Ellon’s ring with *her* hair and *her* likeness in it, all unknown to himself ; and of that circumstance he was never weary pondering, and drawing therefrom much romantic and lover-like comfort.

It seemed to establish a link—a tie—between them !

But Bevil remembered what he had seen of Cadbury at Chilcote ; this latter’s presents incidentally referred to ; his proffered mounts, and, more than all, the observations of Mrs. Trelawney and others ; hence his tongue was tied, and his heart seemed to die within him. What had he compared with Cadbury to offer worthy the consideration of a man like Sir Ranald Cheyne ?

He had not been slow to divine, to detect the footing on which the former stood with the latter—a proud, impoverished, and embittered man, and a lover’s active imagination, full of fears, and doubts, and jealousies, did the rest.

He actually avoided Chilcote, for he knew that any intercourse there would be restricted and restrained.

“To meet her again and again is only playing with fire,” he thought. “For her own sake and mine it is a perilous game.”

But the moth would go to the candle, and while avoiding Chilcote he often rode over to the Grange, where, however, he never had yet an opportunity of seeing Alison quite alone, for, if no one else was present, she had always little Netty Trelawney hovering about her or hanging on to her skirts.

When he did fail, as sometimes happened, to see Alison,

he was almost glad and yet sorry, for her pale and thoughtful face haunted him and filled his heart with a great longing to comfort her ; for somehow he thought she wanted comfort, and to tell her of his love, though the matter should end there, and she tell him to go—go—and never address her again, as he too surely feared that the story of *his* love was one she dared not, must not, listen to.

One day—he never forgot it—he was leaving the Grange, walking slowly, with the bridle of his horse over his arm, when he came suddenly upon her of whom his thoughts were full, about to enter the gate from the roadway.

"Alison !"

The name, all softly uttered, and with infinite tenderness, seemed to escape him unconsciously as he lifted his hat.

"Captain Goring," said Alison, looking up, her pleasure blending with alarm in her face, "you must not call me thus. What would people think ?"

"Pardon me," said he, as he took her hand, while colouring nearly as deep as herself. To resist improving the unexpected opportunity, however, was impossible, so after a little pause, he said :

"It seems an age since I saw you last."

"Don't exaggerate, Captain Goring. We met at Laura's only four days ago."

"Four centuries they have seemed to me. I suppose you walk often in these beautiful woods of Chilcote ?"

"Oh yes, in summer especially ; but the leaves are nearly gone now."

"And in autumn—where ?"

"In the woods too ; but in the broad walk that leads towards the church."

"The walk with the stately old beeches ?"

"Yes."

It was the vista she had shown him from the little terrace.

"And *when* do you generally go there ?" he asked in lower voice, while his hand closed over hers.

"A little before noon," she replied in a whispered voice.

"To-morrow, then," said he, seeking for the eyes that now avoided his, and with a heart beating lightly he galloped along the road towards the camp.

Next day Alison sought her usual walk with a strange palpitation in her bosom, as if something was about to happen ; and

she had a timid fear of being seen—of being watched like one who was about to commit a crime—a great error perhaps ; and yet for the life of her she could not fail to keep the appointment, for such her poor little heart told her it was.

The day was wonderfully bright and beautiful for the season ; streaming through the giant beeches the rays of the sunshine quivered on the green grass and brown fern ; there was a hum of insect life still, and the twitter of sparrows, while an occasional rabbit shot to and fro.

The time passed slowly, till Alison thought she could hear the beating of her heart ; for it seemed as if she and the rabbits, the sparrows and the insects, were to have all the glade to themselves ; when suddenly she heard the gallop of a horse, and in another moment Bevil Goring had sprung from his saddle and taken her hand.

“ My darling, my darling, I knew you would come,” he exclaimed, with tenderness in his tone and passion in his eyes, “ may I call you Alison now ? ”

She did not reply audibly, but the quick rose-leaf tint—one of her greatest beauties—swept over her soft cheek and delicate neck, rising even to her little ears while he repeated :

“ May I call you Alison now—my own Alison—when I tell you that I love you ? ”

He kissed her tenderly on the forehead, the eyes and lips again and again ; and, then suddenly drawing a little way from him, she covered her face with her white hands and began to sob heavily.

“ You love me, don’t you ? ” he asked imploringly.

“ Yes, Bevil,” she replied in a broken voice ; and he, transported to hear his Christian name for the first time on her lips, pressed her to his breast, while she submitted unresistingly, but added, “ I must come here no more now—no more ! ”

“ Why, my love ? ”

“ It is wrong to papa.”

“ Surely you will see me again, darling—surely you will not accept my love and give me up at the same moment ? I shall speak to Sir Ranald if you will permit me.”

“ Useless—useless ; you would but precipitate my fate.”

“ Your fate—what is that ? ”

“ I don’t know—I don’t know,” moaned the girl, in sore bewilderment, while the thin aristocratic face of her father, with

his keen, blue, inquiring eyes, gold *pince-nez* and all, seemed to rise before her.

"I am not rich, I know, Alison darling."

"And I have been used to the want of riches nearly all my life, and now—now—I must go."

"Already! You will be here to-morrow?"

"Oh, no; not to-morrow."

"When?"

"I cannot, dare not say."

"You are cruel to me, Alison," he exclaimed, and with one long, clinging kiss they separated—she to run down the wooded pathway like a hunted hare, and he to ride slowly off in the opposite direction.

He came to that trysting-place the next day, however, and the next too, but no Alison was there, and he could only surmise wildly, and perhaps wide of the truth, what detained her.

Had she been watched? Had their meetings been overseen, overheard?

He knew not precisely how it was with Alison, whom he regarded with a species of adoration, but deep in his heart sank the delightful consciousness that his love pleased her, and that when they did meet again it should have some firmer basis than that brief and stolen meeting had given it. He now understood much of the shyness and timidity her manner had of late exhibited. He hoped now that he also understood the half-veiled light that had filled her grey-blue eyes at his approach, and the sweet roseate flush that crossed her cheek, to leave it paler than before.

She would soon learn to love him fully and confidently, and he would be content to wait for the coming joy of a regular engagement. But how about Sir Ranald Cheyne's views; how about Cadbury's too probable offers; how about "the fate" which, with a broken voice, she said the knowledge of his love for her would but anticipate?

CHAPTER VII.

JERRY AND THE WIDOW.

ALISON's tears, agitation, and fears, together with her admission that he was far from indifferent to her—the memory of their mutual kisses, and all that had passed so briefly, sank deeply

into the heart of Bevil Goring, who thought the secret terms on which they now were, if they were to meet again, as he could not doubt, were ridiculous to himself and derogatory to her.

His natural impulses of honour led him to think he should at once address Sir Ranald on the subject ; but the girl's dread of his doing so made him pause. He thought he would consult Dalton or Wilmot on the subject ; but the former was on duty, and the latter was full of his own affairs ; for Jerry, in fact, had made up his mind to propose—to Mrs. Trelawney !

Jerry made a more than usually careful toilette that forenoon, and was more than ever irreproachable in the matters of boots, gloves, studs, and collar, even to the waxen flower at his button-hole—all with the aid of his soldier valet, Larry O'Farrel, whom he had just found deep in the columns of the *Aldershot Military Gazette*.

"Any news, O'Farrel?" asked Jerry, as he rasped his thick hair with a pair of ivory-handled brushes to adjust the parting of his back hair.

"Only that the Sultan of Turkey is dead, sir."

"The deuce he is—died of want of breath, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir ; strangled or something of that kind, sir."

"Well, O'Farrel, would you like to be Sultan of Turkey? The berth would suit you, for, like the Bradies,

'You'd make a most illigant Turk,
Being fond of tobacco and ladies.'"

"Shouldn't mind, sir, if the pay and allowances was good."

"Well," said Jerry, who was in excellent spirits with himself and the world at large, "send in your application in proper form through me as the captain of your company, and in time I have not the slightest doubt you will be O'Farrel the First."

Jerry said all this so gravely and impressively that, though used to his jokes, not a smile spread over the face of Larry, who raised his right hand in salute while standing erect as a pike.

He had heard about the Champac necklace and the proposed second visit of Tony Dalton, so he resolved to anticipate his brother officer, to "turn his flank," if possible, for Jerry was never more in love in his life, or thought himself so.

He had been dazzled by the notice the brilliant widow had taken of himself ever since the last Divisional Steeplechase

meeting, at which he first met her, and had lost "no end" of gloves to her in bets on the "Infantry Hunt;" her coquettish familiarity, the rapidity with which she adopted him, as it were, and slid into making him do errands for her, calling him by his Christian name or the abbreviation thereof, "Jerry" (which sounded so sweetly on her charming scarlet lips), her *aillades* and tricks with her fan when she tapped his arm or cheek therewith, were all things to think pleasantly of, and served to encourage him.

"Hang it all," thought Jerry; "why shouldn't I open the trenches and make my innings now?"

So he got into his mail-phaëton, and drove leisurely through the North Camp. Dalton was on guard that day, and saw Jerry, of whose mission he had not then the least idea, fortunately, as his own mind was full of Mrs. Trelawney; he gave Jerry a cigar from his case, exchanged a word or two, and saw him turn away into Aldershot—intent on his own destruction, as some of the mess might have said.

"I am awfully spooney," thought Jerry, as he tooled along the level highway, flicking his high-stepper's ears with the lash of his whip. "She is certainly a lovely woman, and would make a creditable wife to me, and be quite a feature at all the garrison balls and cricket matches; but what the deuce will the mess think of Netty—of me having a daughter nearly half as old as myself! There's the rub! She is a pretty little thing just now, but will be awfully in the way ten years hence, when all my aim in life may be to marry her to some coal or iron man, or any fellow that will have her."

And Jerry was laughing softly to himself at this idea as he drew up at the door of Chilcote Grange, and threw the reins to his tiny top-booted tiger.

Mrs. Trelawney was "at home," and in a few minutes Jerry found himself face to face with her, in all her bloom and radiance, seated on a sofa in her charming little drawing-room, the appurtenances of which were all in excellent taste, so far as couches, pretty chairs, fragile tables, curtains, lace, and statuettes could make it, and pretty landscapes hung on the walls with blue ribbons in lieu of cords; and then Mrs. Trelawney's tight-fitting costume of dark blue, which showed the exquisite outline of her bust and shoulders, was perfect, from the ruche of soft tulle round her delicate neck to the dainty slippers which encased her handsome feet.

The brightness of her smile encouraged Jerry, who, after a few well-turned expressions of pleasure at seeing her looking so well, lost no time in "opening the trenches," for he was, though a young fellow, a remarkably cool hand.

The widow's bright hazel eyes dilated with surprise for a moment, and then their white lids and long silky lashes drooped, as if to veil the amusement that sparkled in them, as she withdrew her hand, of which Jerry had possessed himself, and said :

"Oh, Mr. Wilmot, are you in earnest?"

"Could I dare to be anything else in addressing you thus? Earnest—can you ask me!—always when with you, and you know how much I love you. Will you marry me?"

"My dear Jerry, don't be foolish! You are but a boy compared with me, in my experience as a woman of the world especially. It is too absurd!"

"If you are older than me at all, it can only be by a year or two," said Jerry, who thought it was not such a difficult matter to propose as he had first deemed it; "and so, dearest Laura——"

"You must not address me thus."

"But don't you call me Jerry?"

"There is a difference, and I may never do so again."

"Don't say so; besides you cannot help me thinking of you as 'Laura?'"

"Thought is free, but speech is not."

"You will ever be Laura in my thoughts and in my heart, whatever you may be on my lips."

Jerry said this with so much emotion that Mrs. Trelawney ceased to laugh at him, and gave her hand, saying :

"Jerry, let us be friends; be assured we can be nothing more, and, indeed, nothing better."

Jerry retained her soft hand lovingly, and, taking heart of grace therefrom, said :

"I shall speak of this matter again, Laura. I see that I quite deserve your refusal."

"Why?"

"Because I spoke too soon—too abruptly."

"Believe me, dear Jerry, my answer is a final one. I could never bestow on you the love a wife should feel for her husband."

"That would come in time—after marriage, Laura."

"No, it cannot be ; leave me and forget me."

"That is impossible. I shall never, while life lasts, forget you."

Mrs. Trelawney felt an inclination to laugh again. She controlled her lips, but her half-closed eyes were sparkling with a smile.

"I am unworthy the regard I have won. Thrust me from your thoughts, Jerry, and forget me, I pray you, forget me," said she, emphatically, as she again withdrew her hand.

"I have been a fool!" exclaimed Jerry, bitterly, as he twisted his dark moustache and betrayed considerable emotion, at least for him.

"Oh no," said Mrs. Trelawney, patting his shoulders with her fan. "You are no worse than other men. You could not help it, if I was silly enough to be—shall I say it?—amused, perhaps pleased, by all your tender speeches, though I could not believe in them."

Jerry stared at her in doubt whether to be indignant or not, but again her beauty and *espèglerie* of manner triumphed.

"Oh, Laura, once again," he was resuming, when she interrupted him——

"I know all you would say, but please not to renew this subject, or I shall lose all faith in you, Captain Wilmot."

"Say 'Jerry,'" he urged.

"Well, then, Jerry, I like you very much," she said coquettishly, and with an infinite sweetness of tone ; "but I shall be sorry if your persistence makes me view you differently."

"If you like me so very much, why cannot you marry me? You would like me ever so much more afterwards."

"It is impossible," said Mrs. Trelawney, smiling openly now.

"Why are you so hard-hearted?"

"I am *not* hard-hearted. I am indifferent, that is all—what I have been made by others."

"What others?"

"That is my secret. But here come visitors," said she, rising and presenting her hand. "And let us part, Jerry, as I hope we shall meet again—good friends."

In a few minutes Jerry was tooling back to the camp again.

"Her manner is deuced mysterious," thought he, in great

perplexity. "What can she mean? She spoke of herself as 'unworthy,' too. Has she a husband somewhere, after all? Oh, the devil! That can't be."

"Where have you been, Jerry?" asked Dalton, who was again loitering in front of the guard-hut at the camp gate, with a cigar between his lips, and saw his friend coming slowly along, with the reins dropped on his horse's neck.

"I have been at Chilcote Grange," said Jerry, almost sulkily.

"The deuce you have!" said Dalton with surprise.

"There is nothing new in that."

"Calling, were you?"

"Yes, and proposing to the widow *la belle* Trelawney."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Dalton.

"A fact, though."

"And with what success?" asked Dalton, his colour changing perceptibly.

"None at all, old fellow; bowled out; thrown over—I may trust to your silence, I know—fairly laughed at me, and won't have me at any price, by Jove!"

"Proposed, and was refused," said Dalton, as if speaking to himself.

"Proposed right off the reel, whatever that may mean, and was refused. But I don't mean to break my heart over it," added Jerry, twirling and untwirling the long lash of his whip.

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Make love to some one else—get tight at the mess to-night—tight as a drum. So you may go in and win at a canter, if you choose."

"Thanks, Jerry; but I don't mean to propose to the widow," said Dalton, laughing. "She has some history of her own, I think."

"So do I," said Jerry, angrily; "and it is bad form for women to have histories, or mysteries either."

"Sour grapes, Jerry," said Dalton, still laughing.

"I thought you were hit a little in that quarter yourself, Tony; but I am much mistaken if there is not more in her life than you know, or any of us is ever likely to know."

Dalton, though secretly pleased that Jerry had not met with success, was also secretly provoked at what he deemed the young fellow's over-confidence. He had felt himself—he knew not why—curiously affected when in the presence of

Laura Trelawney; there was a subtle influence in her voice and smile that awakened old memories and strangely bewildered him; and especially when she sang, these stole over him and seemed to take tangible form.

"And now, I suppose," said Jerry, as he manipulated a cigar, "I must just do as she probably did when the 'late lamented' took himself off."

"What is that?"

"'Drop some natural tears and wipe them soon,' as Milton has it."

"I'll give you another quotation, Jerry—what does About Adhem say?"

"Don't know—never heard of the fellow."

"'Your lost love is neither the beginning nor ending of life. Several things remain to you. She is false, and you are the victim. Very good. Nature is not going into bankruptcy; the sun will rise and set just the same; corn will grow, birds sing, and the rain fall just as before.' My experience is, that it's a toss up that you are not the better without her, and she not better without *you*."

"Likely enough, Tony: but, as 'Cœlebs in search of a wife,' I need not go *there* any more," half grumbled Jerry, as he whipped up his high-stepper and bowled away through the long street of huts to his quarters; while to Dalton's graver mind there seemed to be something intensely comical in the equanimity with which he took his repulse.

CHAPTER VIII.

"FOR EVER AND FOR EVER."

OF a very different nature in its depth and passion was a love-scene which was taking place not very far distant from the Grange at about the same time.

Alison Cheyne, as we have said, had ceased to take her walk beside the beeches, though her heart yearned for it, and she knew well who was too probably loitering and watching there; so Bevil Goring, at all risks, wrote her a passionate and imploring letter to meet him once again at the same place and hour, with an alternation of days in case of engagements or interruption; and this missive came to her when Alison, who

loved him with all her woman's heart, was wondering hourly how she could get through day after day without him.

"At last! at last!" was the exclamation of each as the tryst was kept, and they met again.

Their hearts were beating fast, and in unison, but in silence, and, if the meeting was a secret and a stealthy one, it was all the more thrilling to both. They were silent for a time, we say, but the silence was not without its eloquence, if the paradox may be used. There was the mystic communion of souls—the touch of hand that closed on hand, of lip that clung to lip—lips that knew not how to utter all that hovered there unsaid.

"You got my letter, darling?" said Bevil, after a time.

"I could not have been here else; but, for heaven's sake, do not write to me again," said Alison, imploringly.

"Why?"

"For fear of papa; my correspondents are so few, his suspicions might be excited."

"How hard is this!—surely we might write to each other occasionally," urged Bevil, caressing her.

"No, my dearest; I dislike the idea of a correspondence that is clandestine, however romantic it may be; and if papa discovered it he would deem it so dishonourable in me—so dishonourable to himself."

"But you will meet me?"

"I shall try, Bevil—I shall try; oh, I cannot help coming to meet you now."

"Allow me, darling, till I can place *another* there!" exclaimed Bevil, as he slipped a ring on her engagement finger.

"Oh, Bevil,—but whatever she was about to say he stopped in a very effectual manner.

"You will wear this for my sake," he whispered.

"I will, darling."

"Say always."

"Always, Bevil—for ever and for ever—and—and," she added, smiling shyly through her tears that mingled love, joy, and something of terror caused to well up in her beautiful eyes, "you will take this from me (I brought it on purpose), poor Ellon's ring—the ring you wore so long without knowing whose face and hair were hidden in it."

"It was an omen of what was to come, love Alison—an

omen that we were to meet, and that you should be mine—mine only!" he replied, embracing her with ardour.

They had now become a little more composed and a little more coherent.

"I have expectations, of course—every fellow has," said Bevil Goring, as they wandered on slowly hand in hand; "but mine are perhaps too remote to suit the views, and may be opposed to the ambition, of Sir Ranald; yet I love you so dearly, so desperately, darling, that if you will wait for me only a year—I ask no more—I shall hope to claim you publicly or set you free. A captain with only a hundred or two besides his pay could scarcely hope to wed your father's daughter, Alison. Let our engagement be a secret one, as you dread an open one. It is not honourable in me to tie you thus, but what *can* I do? Separation now would be a kind of death to me; and oh, Alison, I love you so!"

"And I you, Bevil;" then she added, in a broken voice, "We have had great sorrow, great trouble, we Cheynes, and they have made papa what he is; but I can remember when things were very different, when we were not so poor as we are now, and when he—poor old darling!—had much more of life and spirit in him."

And so, while replying to Bevil's downward glances of love and tenderness, she pressed closely to his side, with her fingers interlaced upon his arm, in the assured confidence of their mutual relations to each other, as they sauntered towards a more sequestered part of the coppice.

Let the dark future hold what it might of severance, tears, and futile longings, for that fleeting time Bevil was hers and she was his—his own!

And so they parted an engaged pair, he not at all foreseeing, and she only fearing, the gathering cloud that overhung them both. Her elderly admirer was in London then. Parliament was sitting, and she, freed from his visits, abandoned herself to the full enjoyment of the present.

She now wore a new ring, a handsome diamond hoop with a guard, upon the third finger of her left hand; but this was unnoticed by Sir Ranald, though it did not escape the sharper eyes of Mrs. Trelawney, who more than once caught her young friend toying with the trinket—turning it to and fro round her slender finger, while regarding it with a sweet, loving, and dreamy expression of face which told its own tale,

But, if Mrs. Trelawney was reticent on the subject of her suspicion, Alison was still more so, and locked her secret in her own breast.

With all the joy of the new position, however, there was more than one element in it from which her sensitive nature shrank.

First, a secret understanding had been established between her and a gentleman friend—as yet deemed only a visitor at Chilcote—unknown to her father and to others. Second, it had not been discovered as yet, but might not always remain so, and thus eventually cause an *esclandre*; and to her it seemed that to make and keep successive appointments—sweet and delicious though they were—that must be kept secret was in itself something wrong and unladylike; but she was the victim circumstances had made her.

At times it seemed very “bad form,” as the phrase went—a want perhaps of self-respect; and yet Bevil Goring was so tender, so loving, so unlike, she thought, every other man in the world that she must risk it all, he was so dear to her.

And then she would dream of the happiness it would be if he were openly accepted by Sir Ranald as her *fiancé*—the joy of seeing him freely come and freely go a welcome guest at Chilcote, the future member of her own family, the future prop of her father’s declining years, taking the place of Ranald and of Ellon; but would such ever—ever be?

On the other hand, Bevil Goring, who was not without a moderate show of proper pride, was not without some similar thoughts, and rather resented the position in which they were placed, giving their solemn engagement the aspect of a rustic flirtation with its furtive meetings; and, after all he had seen of the world, he thought it absurd for him and perilous for the girl he loved so tenderly.

He called at studied or stated intervals at Chilcote, but for Sir Ranald ostensibly; and when in the presence of the latter he and Alison had to act a part and talk the merest common-places, with the memory in their hearts and on their lips of passionate and burning kisses exchanged but an hour perhaps before.

They seemed thus to lead two lives—one to the world and another to themselves; but a time was rapidly approaching when a rough end would be put to all their little secrets.

"Captain Goring seems to send you bouquets and music pretty often, I think?" said Sir Ranald, rather suspiciously, one day.

"Yes, papa," said she, feeling herself grow pale under the glance he gave through his inevitable *pince-nez*; "our garden yields so little in the way of flowers, at this season especially. I can't afford, you know, to buy much music, cheap as it is, and—and——"

"There you go! reminding me of our poverty again," said he in a snappish tone; "but flowers and music have both meanings—at least, they had in my time," he added, turning away and thinking, "I cannot permit her, for a mere girl's fancy—if a fancy she *has*—to throw away Cadbury Court and thirty thousand a year—egad, no!"

Of the City man's coronet he thought little—the Cheynes of Essilmont required no coronets to enhance their old heraldic glories; but the City man's bank-book and acquired acres were a very different matter for consideration now!

CHAPTER IX.

A REPRIEVE FOR A TIME.

"We dine with Cadbury at the Court to-morrow—no party, just ourselves—sharp six—an early dinner," said Sir Ranald to Alison, just as she returned from a meeting with Bevil Goring at the beeches.

"Very well, papa," replied the girl, though she felt herself shiver with anticipation of the annoyance to which she might be subjected; "has he returned so soon?"

"He—who?"

"Lord Cadbury."

"Yes; Parliament has been suddenly prorogued."

In her heart she was sorry to hear it.

"The carriage will come for us punctually," he added, regarding her earnestly, as he thought regretfully—when did he ever cease to do so?—of his own family caraiage, with its hammercloth and heraldic insignia, and his dismay when Lady Cheyne—Alison's ailing mother—was first compelled to walk afoot or take a common cab.

And old Archie Auchindoir groaned at the recollection thereof too, when he came to announce, with a snort, that "the Cawdburry machine was at the porch."

Alison sighed as she entered it ; an invitation to dinner was a small affair, but she felt as if the links of a chain were beginning to close around her while the easily-hung carriage rolled on between the hedgerows in the starlight.

"If his lordship makes any proposition to you to-night, I trust that for my sake, if not for your own, you will not, at least, insult him," said Sir Ranald, breaking the silence suddenly.

"Papa—insult him!" exclaimed Alison in a breathless voice, knowing but too well that the term "proposition" meant a proposal, and her heart seemed to die within her as she pressed to her lips, in the dark, Bevil's engagement ring.

"For your sake and mine consider well and favourably his lordship's views," said her father again.

She remained silent, fearing that the note her father had received must have contained something more than the mere invitation to dinner.

"I shall lose the half of my life, Alison, when I lose you, but I must make up my mind for it one of these days."

Still she made no response, for her heart was away in a most unromantic-looking hut in the infantry lines at Aldershot, where, in fancy, she saw a handsome young fellow, his dark hair cropped close, his skin almost olive in tint, and smooth as a girl's, dark eyes and straight black eyebrows with thick lashes, a heavy moustache, and altogether with a dark manly beauty about him that would have become the costume of Titian or Velasquez, like the cavalier brothers in the portraits at Chilcote.

Through the large square entrance-hall of Cadbury Court, which was panelled with oak, and hung round above the panelling with the old family portraits of former proprietors, and had tall jars of curiously painted china standing in the deep old window bays, with a great lantern of stained glass shining overhead, they were ushered into the magnificent drawing-room, where Lord Cadbury, in evening costume, hobbled from an easy chair to receive them with no small *empressement*, for, though his age of ardour was past, he had not survived that of covetousness ; and among other things now coveted was Alison, whom vanity prompted him to seek that he might exhibit her to society as a conquest.

Alison's drapery seemed to have a soft sweep in it ; she held her fair head high ; a scornful curl hovered on her

lip, and yet she seemed a fragile thing to have so haughty a spirit.

She wore again—for, poor girl, her wardrobe was most limited—the lustreless silk with its rare old lace, and, though harassed, she looked charming in her pale beauty, while almost destitute of ornaments, save a few silver bangles on her slender wrists, for the family jewels—especially the Essilmont diamonds—were all things of the past, and had long since found their way to shop windows in Bond Street; but she wore at her neck a little circular brooch of snow-white pearls from the Ythan, near Ellon.

The grandeur and luxury which surrounded the *parvenu* lord at times irritated Sir Ranald curiously, though from sheer desperation and selfishness he longed for the hour when his daughter should share them; thus he was sometimes prompted to say sharp—almost sneering—things to his prospective son-in-law.

“My old and infernal foe—(pardon me, Miss Cheyne)—is with me again,” said Cadbury, as he hobbled back to his seat.

“Who—what?” asked Sir Ranald.

“The gout—they say it comes with ease and money.”

“With years, too, Cadbury—one can’t have everything as one would wish it,” replied Sir Ranald, with a gush of ill-humour; “all men, we are told, ‘are on the road which begins with the cradle and ends with the grave’; and, in some instances, the world would be better were the distance between the two shorter.”

“’Pon my soul, Cheyne, you are unpleasant,” replied the peer, not precisely knowing what to make of this aphorism; “but there goes the gong for dinner,” and, drawing Alison’s hand over his arm, he led the way to the dining-room. “And so you have quite declined all my offers for a mount, Miss Cheyne?” said he, in a voice of would-be reproachful tenderness, “though I have put my entire stables at your disposal.”

“Yes—a thousand thanks.”

“Your taste has changed; or are you weary of the spins round Twesildon Hill and Aldershot way? Some of them are pretty stiff, I believe.”

Alison coloured at the chance reference to Aldershot, but seated herself at her host’s right hand, and made no reply.

The slow elaboration of the dinner, with its many *entrées* and courses, though it was perfect from the maraschino to the

coffee, the two tall solemn servants in resplendent liveries (like theatrical properties) in attendance upon them, and the silent butler in the background, all oppressed Alison.

"Fine old place this of yours, Cadbury—dates from Charles II., I believe," said Sir Ranald, looking approvingly round the stately dining-room, and then glancing at his silent daughter's face; "it exhibits all the chastened grandeur that only comes by long inheritance, and was not built in a day like the palace of Aladdin."

"It matters little when built," replied Cadbury bluntly, who felt a taunt in the remark, and knew precisely how Sir Ranald viewed his recent title. "It comes to me out of Cornhill and Threadneedle Street; and I believe that Miss Cheyne will agree with me, that it is better to have industrious than expensive forefathers—hewers of wood and drawers of water, though some may deem them. Bosh! Sir Ranald—all men come from Adam," added Cadbury, who, though a peer, was somewhat of a Radical in his proclivities.

"In these points you and I differ," said Sir Ranald stiffly, as he sipped his glass of dry Moselle.

"In this age of the world, a fellow with a pedigree is exactly like a potato," said Lord Cadbury, laughing.

"How do you mean?"

"That the best part of the plant is underground."

Sir Ranald coloured with annoyance up to his pale temples, and said: "I am astonished that you should indulge in such bad form as proverbs; and, as for pedigrees, I never knew any man undervalue them if he ever had one—real or pretended——"

Alison, fearing the conversation was taking an unpleasant turn, looked at her father imploringly, and said, with her brightest smile: "You know, papa, that in this work-a-day age, merit is better than birth."

"And what is the best test of merit?" asked their host.

"Success," said Alison.

"Precisely."

"Not always," said Sir Ranald; "sometimes a defeat may be as glorious as a victory. Was it not said of the clans at Culloden that in great attempts it is glorious even to fail?"

And now, as dinner proceeded, Alison, surprised by the peevish pride of her father, after his warnings in the carriage—notwithstanding the fears with which these warnings had inspired her—with all a woman's tact, exerted herself to turn

the conversation to other subjects, and addressed herself so much to her old host that he gathered hope and courage, and his face beamed with smiles; though his supposed love for Alison was not much more than a strong fancy crossed, which enhanced her value and gave a piquancy to his pursuit of her—a fancy that ere long was to be curiously combined with irritation and revenge.

Over the sideboard, which was loaded with massive plate, hung a great portrait of Sir Timothy Titcomb, the City Knight and first peer, in all his bravery of robe and chain, and aldermanic obeseness of habit; and Alison, as she looked at it, thought of some of the stately portraits at Chilcote of the Cheynes of other days, and of the manly beauty of the two Cavalier brothers who fell in battle for the king—pale, proud, and scornful, with their love-locks and plumed beavers, and the moment dessert was over, she stole away to the solitude of the drawing-room.

She had felt rather lonely during the protracted meal. There was no other lady present. "Why?" she asked herself. "Did not ladies affect the society of the wealthy and titled bachelor?" It almost seemed so.

During the meal and dessert, Alison, though her sweet face wore forced smiles, had a bitter and humiliating sense of how her father, when his peevishness subsided under the influence of good wines, changed in manner, and, with all his inborn and inordinate pride of race and utter contempt for *parvenus* and *nouveaux riches*, seemed to make himself subservient to Lord Cadbury, assenting in the end to his views on everything.

She seated herself at the piano, but did not play, lest, though she had begun a melody of Schumann's, the "Nachtstück," Lord Cadbury might deem the sound a hint that she wished him by her side, and, giving way to thought, she sank into reverie.

As she looked on the splendour and luxury with which she was then surrounded, it was impossible for the young and impulsive girl not to think how pleasant it would be to see no more of duns, and debts, and genteel poverty; to be the mistress of Cadbury Court; to own such a glorious double drawing-room wherein to receive her visitors; to wear wonderful toilettes; to be always surrounded by so many curious and beautiful pictures, cabinets, and statuettes; to have an assured position beyond her own—the position that money alone can

give; to be the mistress of these magnificent park lands, preserves, and pastures; the hot-houses and stable-court; the terraces, with their peacocks and roseries, all whilom part of the heritage of a proud old race that, like the Cheynes of Essilmont, had come down in the world; to shine in society, and have always a full purse to buy whatever she fancied; but to have all these with Lord Cadbury—not Bevil Goring as her husband!

No—no! she shivered, and thrust aside the thoughts a momentary emotion of selfishness was suggesting, as treason to him whose ring was on her finger, and exclaimed, as she pressed it to her lips: “Oh, that but a tithe of these things were my poor Bevil’s!”

She had been too deeply sunk in thought to hear the opening and closing of the drawing-room door, when Lord Cadbury entered alone, having left Sir Ranald dropping into his after-dinner doze in the smoking-room.

There was a listless droop—an unconscious pathos in the attitude of the girl that struck even Lord Cadbury, and though a kind of child, as he deemed her, she was a stately one—a stately girl, indeed, when she chose.

The proposal he had come to make was hovering on his lips; but a consciousness of his years on one hand, and the girl’s youth on the other, rendered him suddenly diffident.

“It is coming now, I suppose—coming at last—this odious, absurd, and insulting proposal! Of course papa and he have arranged all that over their wine and nuts!” thought Alison, with annoyance and anger at her host, and no small dread of her father, who, finding her silent during the first courses of dinner, had rallied her on her abstraction.

Whatever he had come to say, something in the expression of her half-averted face crushed all the hope that wine had raised in Cadbury’s heart, and, seating himself by her side, he could only make some little apology for leaving her so long alone, and regret that he had not time to invite some other lady friend.

He then drew a little nearer her, and, noting that she had a couple of tea rosebuds in her collarette, said insinuatingly: “I saw that your papa is wearing one of your favourite flowers at his button-hole—may I have one also?”

“You are not papa,” she replied curtly, to her half-century Romeo; “such little decorations seem suitable only for young folks,” she added, “but I shall give you a bud with pleasure.”

And quickly her little hands put a rosebud into the peer's lapel, but in a mechanical and task-work manner, while there was an expression on her lips—and full, delicate, and emotional lips they were—and in her small, pale face, with its decided little chin, that prevented him from greatly appreciating the gift as a younger man would have done; so the attempt even at flirtation fell flat.

"Papa does so love tea-roses; we used to have such lovely ones at Essilmont," said Alison.

"Your poor papa!" said Cadbury, softly; "when you marry, how lonely he will be!"

Alison shrank back uneasily, as she thought of Bevil Goring, and replied: "I don't mean ever to marry."

"Indeed! why so cruel to some one in particular? and why in any sense?"

"I could never leave dear old papa in our—our changed circumstances; we are so much to each other."

"But, in marrying, you need not lose him."

"I don't think he would care to share me with another."

"How absurd, Miss Cheyne!"

"I mean to devote myself to him always. He is the only *old* man I shall ever care for; the only old man worth giving up my life to. Well," added Alison, mentally, "that is pretty pointed surely; if he does not take *that* hint, he will never take any."

"But your papa cannot live for ever," said Cadbury, not unwilling to inflict a thrust in return.

"How cruel of you to remind me of that!" exclaimed the girl, her fine eyes suffusing for a moment. "I know that he is some years older than yourself; but I hope he may live to the age of Old Parr!"

References to his years, even when he drew them on himself, always stung her elderly adorer, who felt his own *inborn* coarseness too, as compared with her serene air of distinction; for Alison Cheyne, even when provoked to say that which for her was a sharp thing, always looked *pur sang* from her bright brown hair to her tiny feet.

The absence of even one lady to meet her had surprised the girl; but she knew not, and neither did Sir Ranald, owing to the isolated life he led at Chilcote, that, though fair ones from London were not unfrequent visitors at Cadbury Court, they were of a style that the ladies of the county declined to

meet on any terms, which may give our readers a new insight to the general character of this hereditary legislator.

Quiet though his tone and bearing, in his past life the man had been—nay, was still—secretly a coarse libertine and a *roué*, who indulged in all the vicious propensities which his ample wealth enabled him to do.

Alison Cheyne was his last fancy, and he was determined, by fair means or foul, by marriage or trepan, that his she should be. Her father's poverty and pride, his age and growing infirmities, could all be utilised to this end, and nothing now gave him doubts of easy success but his own years, his grey hairs, and perhaps—her love for another.

"You do not wear many rings, Miss Cheyne; but such a hand as yours requires no ornament."

He took her little white hand in his as he spoke—it was her left one—and regarded it admiringly; and Alison, though trembling for what might now ensue, did not withdraw it. She thought, was not the man quite old enough to be her father?

"I believe greatly in pretty hands," said he, caressing and patting with his right hand the little white one that lay in his left.

"So does papa. It is a hobby of his that they indicate race or culture," replied Alison, smiling now.

Certainly the short, thick digits of Lord Cadbury showed neither, and, poor man, he thought so, for he winced at the girl's reply, it was so like one of Sir Ranald's remarks; and the gentle Alison blushed that she had made it. To do so was altogether unlike herself, but she was irritated by the whole situation.

"That is a charming ring!" said her host, touching Bevil Goring's gift—the gift she prized beyond her own life.

She drew her hand away now.

"I have in that casket a diamond hoop with opals alternately—one of remarkable size and value—and if you would permit me to offer it——"

"Oh, no, never—thanks!" she exclaimed, growing quite pale.

"Why?" he asked, with annoyance and surprise.

"Opals are unlucky."

"Unlucky? This is some Scotch superstition, I suppose?"

"It is Oriental, I believe. Moreover, I have no wish for more rings, and never accept gifts of that kind," she added, with some hauteur of manner.

"I think I startled you by my entrance," said he, trying to recapture her hand again ; but she kept them both resolutely folded before her.

"I was in a reverie, certainly."

"And, posed as you were, made a most fairy-like picture," said he, with his head on one side, his long white moustache almost touching her, and more decided tenderness in his tone than he had ever before adopted.

"A fairy—would I were one!" said Alison, a little impatiently, with a flash in her dark blue eyes, for she was in great dread of what might follow now.

"And what would you do if you were one in reality?" said he, passing a hand caressingly round her soft arm.

"Do? As Robin Goodfellow, 'the knavish sprite,' did."

"How?"

"By one wave of my wand I should punish you for disturbing me."

"In what way?" He had interlaced his pudgy fingers on her arm now.

"By garnishing you, as he did, with Bottom's ears," she replied, with something between a laugh and an angry sigh, "though I should decline to take the part of either Titania or Peasblossom."

Cadbury released her arm and drew back ; he knew not precisely what she meant, but tugged his white moustache and thought : "What the deuce does she mean by Bottom's ears?"

It sounded like a rebuff, anyway, and as such he accepted it—or rather resented it.

"Do compliments displease you?" said he, becoming insinuating again ; "they are but a form of kindness."

"I take them from you as I would from papa ; they pass thus, although a younger man might offend."

Cadbury, whose head was stooped towards her, erected it, lest her glance might be falling on the little bald patch which he was so terribly conscious of being apparent now, and he shivered with annoyance, and felt wrathful at the girl he was so desirous of pleasing.

"Will you sing for me?" said he, after a pause, "I am so fond of music."

"What shall I sing?" asked Alison, seating herself at the piano, and glad to change the tenor of a conversation in which she felt herself ungracious.

"One of your Scottish—one of your national songs."

"'Auld Robin Gray?' " she asked mischievously.

"No, anything but *that*. I am sick of it."

She thought for a moment, and then dashed into another, of which one verse will suffice, and which was quite as objectionable to his lordship, though he did not understand it all.

There's auld Robin Morris that dwells in yonder glen.
He's the king o' a' guid fellows and choice o' auld men,
He has gold in his coffers, he has oxen and kine,
And one bonnie lassie—his darling and mine.

"It's a man's song," said Alison, when she had concluded the five verses, and continued to idle over the keys.

"And I suppose Auld Robin Morris might be twin brother to the other Robin," said Cadbury, with ill-concealed annoyance, as he conceived there was more in the song than his ear detected.

"It only tells the old story, my lord—the hopeless love of a handsome young fellow for a rich and lovely girl—an old man's pride and avarice standing in the way," said Alison, with a soft smile playing about her lips, and thankful that her father's presence put an end to a most obnoxious *tête-à-tête*.

A few minutes later and Lord Cadbury's carriage was conveying them home; but even then Alison's annoyances did not cease.

"Did Cadbury say anything particular to you, Alison dear, when I was having a nap to-night?" asked Sir Ranald, suddenly breaking a silence that was rather oppressive.

"No, papa."

"No! Nothing?"

"Nothing of consequence."

"Did he not propose?"

"Papa, how *can* you think of such a thing? He is a veritable Grandfather Whitehead."

"Think of happiness," said her father, sharply.

"Has wealth aught to do with that?"

"A good deal—if not all. Think of living in a house like that we have just left! Think of presentation days, collar days at Buckingham Palace, the Park, the Row, the Four-in-hand Club by the Serpentine—luncheons at Muswell Hill, and so forth!"

Alison was silent, but full of sad and bitter thoughts.

Around her—or within her reach—she knew were gaieties

in which she could have no part; the Opera, the Row, the Queen's Drawing-room, to which, notwithstanding her real social position, she could no more have access (without the aid of a most trustful milliner) than the daughter of a clown. But she did not repine, as her father did, that she should be debarred from all these sights and circles, and so she replied :

"Papa, as I have often said, one can live without these accessories and surroundings. I have before urged you to quit even Chilcote, and let us go home—home to Essilmont—or what remains of it," she added, in a broken voice, as she thought of Bevil Goring, and how a new light, bright as summer sunshine, had fallen on her life at Chilcote now.

"Home!" exclaimed her father bitterly, "home to the crumbling mansion amid the bleak braes where the Ythan flows, to be a source of local marvel and pity in our impoverished state. No—no! better our obscurity in Hampshire; who cares about us here, or thinks about us at all, unless it's Cadbury, who—who——"

"What, papa?" asked the girl, passionately.

"Would gladly make you his wife, my darling, and render my old age easy, with some of the luxuries we possessed in other times."

Alison shuddered at the suggestion, and again pressed her engagement ring to her lips, as if its presence were a charm, an amulet, a protection to her.

"It is his dearest hope that you may yet journey together through life," urged Sir Ranald.

Alison thought that a good part of the peer's journey had been performed already.

But no more passed. They had reached home, and, slipping his last crown piece into the palm of the servant who opened the carriage door and threw down the steps, Sir Ranald led his daughter into their home, which looked strangely small and gloomy after the mansion they had just quitted.

Alison felt that she had achieved a species of escape or reprieve, but it was only for a time. She felt certain that from first to last the dinner had been a concerted scheme, and that somehow, thanks perhaps to her own *brusquerie*, her elderly adorer, none the less his rank and wealth, had lost courage for the time.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN DALTON.

WE have said that Tony Dalton—tall, dark, and handsome Tony, the pattern officer of his corps—had promised little Netty Trelawney an Indian necklet. He had duly called with it, and clasped round the neck of the slender girl a gold Champac necklace from Delhi, and it is difficult for those even acquainted with the *chef-d'œuvres* of the first European jewellers, to imagine the beautiful nature of these necklaces, so called from the flowers whose petals they resemble.

"I know not how to thank you, Captain Dalton, for your kindness to Netty," said the beautiful widow, with her brightest smile, "it is much too valuable a present for a child."

"She will not always be a child, and in the years to come——"

"The years to come! She is barely nine, and at twenty it is difficult to think of what life may be at thirty—still more at fifty," said she, with a curious emphasis, as her eyelids drooped.

"But, like myself, you are not yet thirty," said Dalton, "hence we are both a long way off fifty."

After this he rode over occasionally from the camp—it was rather an idle time with him then, before the spring drills of the next year commenced—and he seemed rapidly to establish himself at the Grange as a friend, and on a better basis than the younger man, poor Jerry Wilmot, had done, for the latter name was off even the lady's visitors' list now.

In life and history passages seem to repeat themselves; thus, just as Dalton arrived one evening, he heard, through the open window, the voice of Laura Trelawney singing the old song before referred to, and with its strain there came many a memory he had been striving to forget.

"Strange!" he muttered; "that song again!"

Sweet, clear, and sad, as if it was meant for him, and him alone, her voice seemed to come floating to him in liquid melody, in pain and pathos.

Then he heard some merry voice, with which he was familiar; and as he was ushered into the pretty drawing-room wherein Jerry met his doom, for a man who was evidently fast conceiving a *tendresse* for the brilliant Mrs. Trelawney, it was curious that he should feel a kind of relief—a kind of

protection for himself, or from committing himself too far—in the casual presence of Alison Cheyne and Bevil Goring.

The former smiled brightly, and gave Bevil a glance of intelligence as Dalton was ushered in. It was evidently, both thought, becoming a case, and Alison was already beginning to see herself a prospective bridesmaid and Bevil groomsman.

"How curious you should all three visit me just at the same time!" said Mrs. Trelawney.

"I was visiting my poor," said Alison.

"And came to comfort the widow and orphan on the way."

"Have you many recipients of your bounty, Miss Cheyne?" said Dalton, for lack of something else to say.

"I have little in my power; but they are all so grateful and so good."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Trelawney, "I don't take so charitable a view of human nature as you do, child; if the poor are generally virtuous, it is because they have not the guineas to be wicked with."

"One of your wild speeches, Mrs. Trelawney, I hope," said Goring; "my guineas are few—thus I have a fellow-feeling."

And, leaving the last visitor and their hostess to discuss the point *tête-à-tête*, the lovers strolled into the now somewhat desolate garden, where the fallen leaves lay thick; but their own emotions seemed to brighten it with all the flowers that ever grew in Eden, and with the walks they were pretty familiar with now.

"And so you were dining *en famille* at old Cadbury's place?" said Goring, as drew her hand over his arm and retained it there. "Was it a slow affair, darling?"

"Utterly slow," said Alison, with a sigh, while looking into his face with smiling eyes.

"Tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell," replied Alison, feeling the while terribly conscious that there was far too much if inferences were to be drawn; but she shrank from giving pain to her lover by relating her father's desires and bluntly-expressed wishes, though she feared that Bevil was quite sharp enough to suspect more than he or she admitted, else whence his questions.

And now, lover-like, their conversation, interesting only to themselves, drifted rapidly into the never-ending topic of

their own passionate regard for each other, their future hopes, and certainly most vague plans, while dusk was closing round them—the soft semi-darkness of an autumnal night ; yet it was full of distant sounds, and not a few sweet scents that mingled with the heavy odour of the fallen leaves.

Alison had tied a little laced handkerchief over her hair, and her eyes were beaming upward, sweetly and coquettishly, as they met the glances of her lover, who thought she looked like the sweetest picture ever painted, especially when her long lashes rested on the paleness of her cheek when she cast them down.

“May I see you home when the time comes?” he asked.

“Not for worlds, Bevil darling.”

“It is so dark.”

“But Daisy Prune is to call for me, and we know all the roads and lanes hereabout as well as if we had made them.”

They were very, very happy just then, these two—happy in the security of each other’s love, and could little foresee the turmoil and misery a little time was to bring forth for both.

By the light of a softly-shaded lamp the other pair were *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room, maintaining a curious and disjointed conversation, as if some unuttered or unutterable secret loaded the tongue of each ; and, truth to tell, the officer, who had led his men to the storming of more than one hill-fort on the vast slopes of the Hindoo Koosh—who had been wont to pot his tiger and stick his furious pig in the jungle—who had been all over India, from the Sand Heads of the Hooghly to the gates of Cabul—if he had now come on a love-making errand, was the less self-possessed of the two.

Mrs. Trelawney possessed the rare art of dressing in such dainty perfection as never woman did before, he thought ; and all her toilettes seemed to harmonise so much with the time and place in which he saw them, and with his own taste.

As they conversed on indifferent subjects, a strange and subtle magnetism drew their eyes to meet from time to time in a manner that expressed or admitted much, and yet no particular word of regard—still less of love—escaped Dalton ; but little Netty by her remarks sometimes made both feel very awkward, and wish that she was relegated to the region of the nursery.

The child, encouraged by his tender manner to herself—more than all, her beautiful necklet—often hung with confidence and familiarity about him, and with pretty pertinacity questioned

him about his past adventures, where he had been and what he had seen, if he ever had a wife, and much more to the same effect, as if his past life were of interest to her, as it was no doubt beginning to be to her mamma; and on this occasion, by a simple remark, she made both feel quite uncomfortable.

Resting her elbows on his knee, and planting her little face between her hands, she looked up in his eyes and said:

"Captain Dalton, do you come to see me or mamma?"

"I come to see both," replied Dalton, smiling as he stroked her bright hair.

"But you talk so much more to mamma than to me."

"You are a little girl, Netty; well?"

"That I think—I think——"

"What? A penny for your thoughts."

"That you are in love with mamma. Is it so?"

Strange to say, at this remark Dalton grew very pale, while Mrs. Trelawney, though she coloured considerably, laughed excessively at the situation thus created, but was rather surprised that Dalton failed to take advantage of it, even to pay her, as he could easily have done, a well-turned compliment.

"Netty seems to have quite a matrimonial interest in you, Captain Dalton," said she, still laughing.

"Yes; she has more than once asked me if I ever had a wife."

Mrs. Trelawney, while her own bright eyes were partly hidden by the shade on the globe of the lamp, was keenly scrutinising the half-averted face of her admirer.

"You have not been always a woman-hater?" she asked.

"I never was—far from it—the reverse," said he, hastily.

"And yet in all those years you have never fallen in love?"

"I never thought of it till I came back to England. One does not think of marriage up country in the land of brown squaws."

"And so you never thought of it?"

"Never."

Dalton was colouring deeply now, and she extracted his answers from him "as if she had been extracting his teeth," as she afterwards told Alison.

"Now, however, under better auspices, and at home, I may wish to change," he began.

"Change what?" interrupted Mrs. Trelawney, with a curious sharpness of tone; "to reform? I have read that we often hear of a woman marrying a man to reform him, but that no one ever heard of a man marrying a woman to reform *her*."

Dalton felt that his love-making, if love-making it was, took a strange turn now, and that she was infusing banter or rebuke into the conversation.

"I cannot comprehend, Mrs. Trelawney, how it is that when I am with you," said Dalton gravely, with a soft and half-broken voice, "there comes back upon me much of my past life, or rather a portion of it, that I would fain forget."

"How is this?"

"Because you have some strange and magnetic influence over me, to which I have not as yet the key. I have sought to bury, to forget that past I refer to—to live it down——"

"I have no wish to pry into your secrets, Captain Dalton, nor to act the part of a Father Confessor, so pray don't confide in me," said Mrs. Trelawney, with a—for her—curious hardness in her usually sweet voice. "I have read somewhere that life itself, from the cradle to the grave, is but a kind of gloaming hour, wherein mortals grope dimly after happiness, and find it not."

"I would that the happiness of my future life lay in your hands, Mrs. Trelawney," said Dalton, with an expression of eye and tone of voice there was no mistaking.

Mrs. Trelawney did not reply, but she smiled with a curiously mingled expression of triumph, pleasure, and, strange to say, disdain, rippling over her bright face—emotions to which we shall ere long have the key.

Her cheeks flushed, her lips curved with her smile, and for a moment her whole mien was that of a young girl delighted with flattery. Dalton was about to say something more, when the sudden disdain that replaced the first expression prevented him, and she said laughingly:

"I can give the ladies a capital addition to the creed, Captain Dalton."

"What is it?"

"Never to love any man, but make all men love you; as the song has it, 'Love not—the thing you love may change;' but here come Miss Cheyne and Captain Goring."

"A strange woman—an enigma, indeed," thought Dalton, who had an unpleasant suspicion that she was secretly deriding the avowal he had, perhaps, been on the point of making.

"Oh, Alison," she said suddenly, "you remember Bella Chevenix, the handsome, dashing girl, who always wears rich dresses, but of green or gray tints, a muslin fichu, with a yellow

rose in it, and so forth. You have heard what has happened, I suppose ? ”

“ That she was engaged, or nearly so, to Colonel Graves ? ”

“ Yes—but he has behaved disgracefully. ”

“ How ? ”

“ What do you think her family found out ? ” she asked, addressing Dalton, to his surprise.

“ That he was no colonel at all, perhaps, ” said he.

“ Oh, worse than that. ”

“ Worse !—what could be worse ? ”

“ I do not care to think, Mrs. Trelawney—not knowing the parties—that he was a criminal, perhaps. ”

“ Worse still. ”

“ Good heavens, Laura ! ” exclaimed Alison.

“ And he proposed for her ? ”

“ Yes ; was it not horrible, Captain Dalton ? ”

“ Don’t appeal to me, ” he replied abruptly.

“ Bella was at a ball in Willis’s Rooms, dancing with Wilmot, of Captain Dalton’s regiment, while the colonel was their *vis-à-vis* with some one else, and Jerry, in the most casual way, asked her if she knew Mrs. Graves. Bella thought he was talking nonsense, but it turned out to be truth, as there *is* a Mrs. Graves ; but, as Bella is a professional beauty, luckily her affections were not too deeply engaged. However, such affairs are a warning to us all in society. Don’t you think so, Captain Dalton ? ”

But for the shaded lamp, the sudden paleness that overspread the handsome face of Dalton would have been apparent to all at this anecdote of Mrs. Trelawney, who saw that his eyes drooped, and that not even his heavy moustache concealed the quiver of his lip as he took his hat and prepared to retire.

“ How strange Captain Dalton looks ! ” whispered Alison to Goring, as they were parting.

“ Yes ; poor Tony has become a changed man, moody and irritable, since he has known your friend, Mrs. Trelawney. He is no longer the quiet, gentle, and easy-going fellow he used to be. And now, once again, good-bye, my darling. ”

And with a pressure of the hand, a kiss snatched, all the sweeter for being so, they parted, knowing when and where they were to meet again.

Whatever was the secret, unrevealed yet, that hung on Dalton’s heart, he left the house of Mrs. Trelawney with a

heaviness of soul and gloom of manner that were but too apparent to Bevil Goring. There was a baffled and dismayed expression in his face that made him all unlike his old soldierly self, and on his lips there was an unuttered vow that he would go near Chilcote Grange no more—a vow, however, that he found himself unable to keep.

CHAPTER XI.

A WRITTEN PROPOSAL.

"DEVILLED kidneys, actually," said Sir Ranald, in high good-humour, next morning at breakfast. "I thought the anatomy of our butcher's shop seemed never to include kidneys."

Alison was officiating at the tea-board in her plain but pretty morning-dress, and was thinking smilingly of the *tête-à-tête* in the twilighted garden the evening before, when Archie laid some letters before her father, who glanced at them nervously. All that were in blue envelopes he knew instinctively to be duns, and thrust aside unopened. One in a square cover, that had thereon the initial C., surmounted by a coronet, he knew to be from Lord Cadbury, and opened, and read more than once, with a pleased, yet perplexed face, his brows knitted, yet his lips and eyes smiling.

"From Lord Cadbury, is it, papa?" asked Alison, after a pause.

"Yes, and concerns you."

"Me?"

"Intimately."

"In what way—how?" she asked, with a heart that sank with apprehension.

"By making a formal proposal through me."

"For what?"

"Can you ask, child? Your hand."

"Oh, papa, nonsense?" exclaimed Alison, growing very pale nevertheless, but in the desperation of her heart resolved to treat the matter with a certain degree of levity, as if too ridiculous for consideration.

The truth was that, with all the confidence given him by his wealth and position, and all the coolness acquired by many past but coarse intrigues, he had not the courage to propose personally to a girl like Alison Cheyne, but did so thus, through

her father, whose selfishness and impecuniosity made him, as he was well aware, an ally.

"He writes very humbly and modestly for a man of such wealth and weight in the country," said Sir Ranald. "Do you wish to see his letter?"

"No, papa, I have no interest in the matter," replied Alison faintly.

"She has always permitted me to take the place of a friend—better than I merited,' he writes, 'but that has been from the innate goodness of her heart, on which I know that I have no right to found the expectations that have drawn forth this letter.' Very well expressed indeed," added Sir Ranald, eyeing the missive through his *pince-nez*, "and he winds up so nicely about your beauty and the wealth he can lay at your feet, and so forth."

"And so, papa, I am to deem my face my fortune?" said Alison, still endeavouring to make light of the matter.

"Not alone."

"What more is there, then?"

"You are a Cheyne of Essilmont."

"How ridiculous of this man, who is old enough to be my father! And so, papa, this is my first proposal?"

"Your first, how many do you expect—you a penniless lass?"

"With a long pedigree."

"Yes," replied her father, with growing irritation, "how many do you expect of any kind, as society goes now-a-days? Consider this well—or why consider at all?—but accept his offer for your own sake and mine."

"But without love, papa?" said the girl softly.

"You can't live on that, like the æsthetic bride in *Punch*, on her teapot," exclaimed Sir Ranald. "In asking you to marry him, I rather ask you to marry his house in Belgravia, his place here in Hampshire, his equipages and family jewels, as I suppose he calls them."

"Oh, papa," said Alison, proudly and reproachfully, "is it you, Cheyne of Essilmont, who suggest this to me?"

"Yes—I, Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk—the bankrupt and the beggar," he replied, with a burst of impressive bitterness.

"Papa, how can you, so proud of race, go in for vulgar mammon worship so unblushingly?"

"My poverty, but not my will, consents."

"I thought daughters were sold only in Circassia."

"Not at all, they sell too in Tyburnia and Belgravia to the highest bidder, and surely with all he can give you, all that he can surround us with, you might be able to tolerate him as a husband."

But Alison could only think of Bevil Goring, and interlaced her fingers tightly beneath the tablecloth.

"There is nothing in this world like riches," exclaimed Sir Ranald, glancing at the unopened blue envelopes, and tightening the silk cords of his sorely frayed dressing-gown. "What riches give us let us first inquire."

"Meat, fire, and clothes. What more? Meat, clothes, and fire," said Alison, with a sickly smile.

"Alison—Miss Cheyne," said her father, with increasing asperity. "This offer of marriage is a serious matter, and not to be dismissed thus, by a quip or apt quotation."

"You admit that it is *apt*?"

"I admit nothing—save that Cadbury has talked this matter over with me before."

"I suspected as much," said Alison, bitterly.

"Thus, if you marry him, I know that besides making noble settlements upon you he will—by a scrape of his pen—clear off nearly all the fatal encumbrances on our Scottish property; and I shall die, in old age—as I lived till ruin overtook me—Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk."

"And when you die, papa——" Alison began, in a broken voice.

"The estate becomes yours and his—it is all one."

("And I have promised to wait for Bevil!" thought the girl in her heart.)

"In the hope that you might yet learn to love him—indeed upon the faith that you would do so yet," said Sir Ranald, after a pause, "he has made me, kindly and generously, heavy advances, which I have lost unwisely, and am totally unable to repay. How then am I to act? I can but look to you to listen to him patiently and, with some consideration for *me*, if he speaks of his love to you again, Alison."

To the latter it seemed that it was always himself, not her, that he considered in this proposed matrimonial bargain.

The old man was very white; his thin lips were tremulous with earnestness; his china-blue eyes lowered beneath the glance of his daughter, and his naturally proud heart was wrung with pain at the admissions he was making.

She remained silent.

"You can have no previous—no secret attachment, Alison?" said Sir Ranald, after another pause.

The existence of one dearer to her than her own life was ignored in this question.

What was she to reply? but reply she must, as he was eyeing her keenly, and even suspiciously.

"Do not be angry with me, dearest papa, but Lord Cadbury I never, never could learn to love," she urged.

"And what about this fellow Goring?" he exclaimed sternly, as he thought suddenly of many presents of flowers and music, with *Punch's* and *Graphics*, etc.

"Goring," she repeated, growing deadly pale even to the lips.

"It cannot be that you are capable of such infernal folly and tomfoolery as to be wasting a thought on *him*?"

"He is different indeed," said Alison, almost with anger, but added, "believe me, papa, the man I love most in the world is yourself;" and she nestled her sweet face in his neck as she spoke.

"I have had my suspicions of Captain Goring for some time past; an empty-headed military dandy—handsome, I admit, but too handsome to have much in him," resumed Sir Ranald angrily—"a dangler, a detrimental, who, I have no doubt, in weak recommendation of himself, could say, like the man in the play, 'I have not much money, but what I have I spend upon myself.'"

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Alison, who was blushing deeply now.

"Pardon me if I wrong you, child," said Sir Ranald; "but in this most serious matter of your whole future life I cannot, and must not, be crossed."

Alison felt her heart sinking, for, after this pointed and sharp allusion to Bevil Goring, it was pretty plain that his visits to Chilcote, though supposed to be casual ones at stated intervals, would have to cease.

Sir Ranald had waited for change of fortune, for something to turn up, year after year, as old Indian officers used to wait for the Deccan prize money, as a means of liquidating accumulated debt—means that never came; and now Cadbury's offer had come to hand like a trump card in the game with fortune!

"I cannot live for ever, Alison, think of that," said he, after a long silence.

Alison had thought of it, and loving, yea, adoring her father

as she did, the fear that she should one day surely lose him made her heart shrink up and seem to die within her.

She would be alone—most terribly alone in this bleak world—when that event came to pass; and she recalled the cruel words of Lord Cadbury, that “he could not live for ever,” with peculiar bitterness now. To whom, then, could she cling if not to Bevil Goring?

“Shall I write to Cadbury that you say ‘Yes,’ Alison?”

There were great, hopeless tears standing in her dark blue eyes, her quivering lips were tightly pressed together, and her slender white fingers were tightly interlaced, as she replied:

“Papa, I would rather die first!”

“And this is your irrevocable answer?”

“It is.”

Two days passed now—days of unspeakable misery to Alison, before whom her father again and again set all his monetary troubles, his present misery, and too probable future ruin, till her heart was wrung and her soul tortured within her by a conviction of her own selfishness in not making a sacrifice of herself and Bevil Goring; but her love of the latter on the one hand, and her horror and repugnance of Lord Cadbury on the other, prevailed, and Sir Ranald found that he could neither lure nor bend her to their purpose.

After this he wrote a letter to Cadbury full of expressions of gratitude for the honour done himself and his daughter (he snorted when he wrote the word “honour”), and with hopes that the latter would yet see the folly of delay—it was, he felt assured, only a little delay, she would no doubt give her acceptance). He felt himself too deeply in Cadbury’s debt, even to hint that she had refused to consider his proposal of marriage in any way but one—with dismay and aversion.

Lord Cadbury, however, saw precisely how the matter stood, for rumours of the meetings at the beeches had reached him, and he viciously tugged his long, white, horse-shoe-like moustaches.

Then he tore Sir Ranald’s letter into minute fragments, and with an expression of anger—even of malignancy—in his cunning eyes, prepared to take the first train to town, muttering the while:

“We shall see, my pretty Alison—we shall see!”

CHAPTER XII.

IN ST. CLEMENT'S LANE.

It was the early dusk of a dull November day—a day in which there had not been even twilight in London—such days as are only to be seen there and in Archangel—when one of those awful black fogs prevail, when gas is lighted everywhere, when all wheel traffic is suspended, when cabs, 'buses, and drays cease to run, and sounds become curiously deadened, or muffled. Lord Cadbury, from narrow Lombard Street, turned into that narrower alley which lies between it and King William Street called St. Clement's Lane, from the ancient church dedicated to that saint some time prior to 1309, and for the rebuilding of which, after the great fire, the parish bestowed upon Sir Christopher Wren the curious fee of "one-third of a hogshead of wine."

Here now are the close, narrow, and in many instances mean and sordid-looking offices of merchants, insurance agents, bill-brokers, and others, who, however, turn over vast sums of money in their humble-looking premises.

To this curious quarter of the City Lord Cadbury had come, with his thoughts intent—strange to say—upon Alison Cheyne! The girl's great loveliness and purity had fired his passion—pure love it was not, nor could it be—and a sentiment of jealousy, pique, and more than either—something of revenge—made him resolve, through her father's means, to bend, to bow, to crush her to the end he wished!

At his years he was more than ever exasperated by the thought of having a young and handsome rival like Bevil Goring to contend with; and much jealousy had thus made the elderly lover mad with spite and reckless of consequences; and as he knew that poverty and shame made Sir Ranald desperate he resolved to take his measures accordingly.

The longing to break her pride and to triumph over Goring made Cadbury meanly revengeful, and thus it was that on the day in question he went groping towards the office of Mr. Solomon Slagg, a bill discounter in this gloomy locality.

A narrow passage, closed by a green baize-covered swing door, led to a room, or rather den, in which a couple of clerks sat all day long, and often far into the night, perched on two high stools, writing in the same dreary ledgers by gaslight, for the blessed rays of the sun never found entrance there all the

year round; and in a smaller den beyond, usually lighted, but dimly, by a curious arrangement of reflectors, sat Mr. Solomon Slagg, writing by the light of a single gas jet, minus shade or glass, but encircled by a wire guard.

The dingy room—the walls, ceiling, and bare floor were all of the same neutral kind of gray tint—had a little fire-place, wherein stood a meagre gas stove. Above it on shelves were numerous mysterious-looking bottles containing samples of wine, and against the wall were numerous oil-paintings, placed there, not for ornament, but with reference to Mr. Slagg's multifarious modes of doing business and "doing" the public.

His rather round but misshapen figure was wedged deep in a black leathern easy chair at an ink-spotted desk, whereon lay piles of battered and greasy-looking ledgers and day-books. His bald head was sunk between his heavily-rounded shoulders; he had large, coarse ears, a nose like an inverted pear, pendulous cheeks, to which straggling gray whiskers were attached, and he had cunning little eyes that twinkled in deep and cavernous sockets.

Altogether Mr. Solomon Slagg was not a pleasant person to look upon, but his face, such as it was, lighted up when he saw his visitor, to whom he bowed low, without rising, and to whom he indicated a chair by the wave of his pen, with which he made a mark or sum total on a page, and, closing a small ledger, turned to Lord Cadbury.

"Stifling den this of yours," grumbled the latter, as he lighted a cigar; "no objections to smoking, I suppose?"

"None, my lord."

"A vile day of fog—utter black fog. Had the devil's own trouble in making you out on foot from Moorgate Street Station; but, you got my letter, of course?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And acted upon it?"

"Yes, my lord," said Slagg, slowly, "I was just about to write——"

"That you had got up all Cheyne's blue paper?"

"Yes, in obedience to your directions, I took up all the acceptances I could trace, and, as he has been more than once in the Black List, I wonder that he has been able to draw bills without some one to back them. There is some of his paper," added Slagg, pointing to some very crumpled-looking slips.

"Renewed more than once apparently."

"Oh! yes—again and again, in some instances."

"Poor old devil!" said my Lord Cadbury, with reference to his prospective father-in-law; "what is the 'demmed total,' as Mr. Mantalini would say?"

"About a couple of thousand."

Cadbury smiled—the sum was a trifle to him; but its demand meant utter ruin to the impecunious Sir Ranald, who could no more meet his acceptances than fly.

"My pretty Alison will find that at Chilcote she has been living in a kind of fool's paradise," thought he, as he tugged his long white moustache with very great complacency.

"You will put all the pressure you can upon Sir Ranald when these bills fall due—no more renewals at any risk; at the same time it must all appear as your affair, not mine—my name must not appear in the matter."

"Of course not, my lord; if it did——"

"Don't even think of it, for in that case it would prove my ruin in a quarter where I wish to be well thought of."

"Sir Ranald Cheyne seems to have been anticipating his income."

"Till, I suppose there is nothing more to anticipate."

"Exactly."

"Good—good!" exclaimed Cadbury, as he struck his gloved hands together; "then you'll put the screw on him the moment you can do so."

"Before this week is out, my lord. There is one acceptance there for £300 on which the three days of grace are yet to run, and then I shall act upon the whole. Your lordship gave me *carte blanche* to acquire all these documents, and, having done so, your money must be repaid to you through me."

"Precisely so."

The two shook hands, and again Cadbury dived into the choking fog, to make his way westward to his club as best he might, feeling assured that an unexpected pressure would now be put upon the luckless Alison, by means of her father's mental misery and inordinate pride.

He knew how intense was the girl's devotion to the old man; he knew also that the latter, with all his love for his daughter, was not without a considerable spice of gross selfishness in his nature; that he loved the good things of this life very much, all the more that many were gone, and more might go, utterly beyond his reach, unless someone interposed to save him—and so

Cadbury chuckled as he thought of the fatal ball he had set in motion with the aid of Mr. Solomon Slagg.

And that evening, when in the brilliantly lighted dining-room of his magnificent and luxurious club in Pall Mall, after a sybarite repast, with many curious and elaborate *entrées*, he drank his Clicquot Veuve and Schloss Johannisberg, not an atom of compunction occurred to him for the misery he was working the poor but proud old baronet, and the sweet girl, whom, *bon gré mal gré*, he had resolved to make his wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ENIGMA.

DESPITE the silent vow he had made, Captain Dalton could not keep away from Laura Trelawney, the only woman the world seemed to hold for him, and yet whom he had no hope of winning.

His was no lovesick boy's fancy, yet it made him sallow, pale, and worn-looking, restless in solitude, and taciturn in society, always seeking for action, not for any tangible result that action gave, but as a means of present distraction.

The baffled Jerry Wilmot was not slow, at mess and elsewhere, to note the change in the generally quiet and even tenor of his brother officer's general mood, and drew his own conclusions therefrom, and these were that he was not progressing favourably in his suit with the brilliant young widow.

"If a widow she really is," said Jerry one day after evening parade, when Dalton's groom brought his horse round to the mess hut, and he was about to ride over to Chilcote Grange.

"How—what the devil do you mean, Jerry?" asked Dalton, greatly ruffled.

"Only that a rumour is abroad that has in it a deuced unpleasant sound."

"To what effect?"

"That her husband is not dead—that she is not a widow at all—that he ran away from her, or something of that kind. Have you not remarked how she sneers at matrimony? Egad, I hope she is not *divorcée*!"

"Nonsense, Jerry; howdare you let your tongue run on thus!"

"Little birds sing strange songs sometimes."

"Sour grapes, Jerry, that is all," replied Dalton, laughing, but only from the teeth outwards, as he rode off to what Wilmot said was "his doom."

The rumour—real or alleged—so casually mentioned by Jerry, rankled deeply in Dalton's mind for a time, but it passed away when he found himself in the presence of Mrs. Trelawney, and he saw again her soft hazel eyes, so delicately lidded, their long lashes and eyebrows darker than her rich chestnut hair ; her dress that hung in clinging folds around her, and showed her beautiful form, grandly outlined as that of a classical statue ; and when Antoinette—or Netty, as he called her now—stole her hand, white as a snowflake and tiny as a fairy's, into his, and, looking at him with eyes blue as forget-me-nots, said, "I love you!" he stroked the shower of golden tresses that were held back from the child's brow by a blue silk riband, and replied, while he kissed her, "And I love you, Netty, so much!"

Her tiny mouth was all a-tremble with fun and pleasure as she asked: "And don't you love mamma, too?"

He made no answer, but Mrs. Trelawney, whose eyes had been suffused with tender pleasure at his kind manner with Netty, now laughed and said: "What do you mean, you *enfant terrible*?"

"I heard you and Alison Cheyne talking of Captain Dalton the other day, and I thought I should so like him for a papa."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Trelawney.

"Because I never had one."

"Never had one?" she repeated laughing.

"No; I am the only little girl that never had."

"You don't remember him then?" said Dalton, recalling the remarks of Jerry.

"How can one remember what one never, never had?" said little Netty, sententiously.

"Go to your nurse, Netty," said her mamma, "I hear her calling for you."

So Netty was summarily dismissed, and not a moment too soon, as both her listeners thought, and an awkward pause was about to ensue, when Mrs. Trelawney said, suddenly: "Your friend Goring seems desperately smitten with my sweet little friend Alison Cheyne."

"If so, I wish him all success," replied Dalton. "Goring is the king of good fellows, and the girl is quite beautiful."

"The French have a curious saying that it is not necessary to be beautiful in order to be a beauty; but Alison Cheyne is indeed lovely, and has, in a high degree, a lady-like dignity about her; and, with it, is so charmingly simple and *piquante*.

I hope Goring is rich ; her father, I am pretty sure, looks forward to a wealthy alliance for her."

"Then, in that case, I fear poor Bevil will be out of the running," said Dalton ; "he has some expectations, I know, but they are very remote, I fear. We cannot, however, control our hearts, nor, when in love, do we care about calculating eventualities," he added, very pointedly, while taking Mrs. Trelawney's delicate and shapely little hand between his two ; but she withdrew it, and, while discharging a whole volley of expression by one flashing *oillade* of her hazel eyes, she exclaimed, laughingly : "Take care, Captain Dalton, or I shall be led to infer that you are falling in love with *me*."

"You know that I have done so—that I have loved you since the first moment we met."

She was laughing excessively now, and Dalton felt that a lover laughed at had little hope of success, so he said, gravely : "I hope you are not playing fast and loose with me and my friend Wilmot."

"Have you no better opinion of me, Captain Dalton ?"

"He gave me to understand that you declined his addresses."

"Whatever they may be—yes," replied the smiling widow, "but I would not have mentioned the matter, as he seems to have done—poor Jerry !"

"Why mock my earnestness ?" asked Dalton, in a pointed tone of voice.

"Because you cannot love me as I would wish to be loved."

"You do not know me, Mrs. Trelawney."

"I know you better than you know yourself !" she exclaimed, looking him full in the face with a peculiar expression that puzzled him, while her smiles vanished.

"Perhaps you do," said he, "but I think that, if you once loved a man, that love would end only with your life."

She regarded him for a moment with an almost disdainful smile, and said : "And you, Captain Dalton—if you loved a woman, how long would your love last ? Only while it suited your fancy or convenience."

"You are very severe with me," he observed, with some surprise at her taunting manner.

"Not more than you know you deserve."

At these words Dalton visibly chanced colour, and became confused. To what secret of his past life was she referring, he thought ; to what long-buried thoughts was she finding a clue ?

"You have become very silent," said she.

He sighed deeply, and rose as if to depart.

"Pardon me, if my words pain you, Captain Dalton," said she, all her spirit of raillery gone; "but you have 'grown pale, as if the shadow of death were on you."

"It is not that," said he, with a sickly smile.

"What then?"

"The shadow of a life, rather."

"Whose?" she asked, lightly touching his hand.

"My own!"

"He *has* a secret that shall one day be mine!" thought Mrs. Trelawney, while at the same moment Dalton was thinking of the rumour mentioned by Jerry Wilmot, and marvelled if her occasional peculiarity of manner arose from that rumour being founded on truth!

But Dalton felt his heart too much involved, and himself too deeply committed to let the matter end here.

"Your treatment of me is most strange, Mrs. Trelawney, even cruel, I think, Laura—permit me to call you so—even for once," he said. "My society has always seemed to give you pleasure, and you have always seemed glad when I caressed your little daughter and gave her little presents; and, truth to tell, dearest Laura, my heart has somehow gone out to that child as if she were my own."

"Your own—yours!" exclaimed Mrs. Trelawney, as she pressed a hand upon her heart, and lowered her eyelids, as if to hide the expression of joy, exultation, and odd to say, irritation that mingled in her face.

He trembled violently, as if struggling with his love of her, and something mental seemed for a minute to load or fetter his tongue till he said, in a low voice: "If I can prove that I have the right to ask you, will you marry me—will you be my wife, Laura?"

"Do not ask me," she replied, trembling in turn.

"Why—why?" he asked, impetuously.

"Are you aware how strangely you *prelude* your proposal by referring to some eventuality, Captain Dalton?" said she, with some hauteur; "but be assured that I can never be *more* to you than I am *now*, were I to live a hundred years."

"And so you are but a cruel coquette after all," said Dalton, recovering himself; "one who has fooled me—a man of the world, as I deemed myself—to the top of my bent,

only to throw me over at last. Well, perhaps I am rightly served," he added, bitterly.

"You *are* rightly served, Captain Dalton," said she, laughing once more.

"What do you know—what do you mean?"

"What your own heart tells you; but here is a visitor, Bella Chevenix; let us at least part friends."

"Mere friends we can never be," said he, sadly.

"As you please, Captain Dalton; but be assured we have not seen the last of each other yet," she replied, with one of her most brilliant and coquettish smiles, as he bowed himself out; and so ended an interview which both felt had included the most *singular* bit of love-making they had ever been involved in.

"By Jove, she is an enigma," muttered Dalton; but she had no such thought of *him*.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SOMETHING IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN."

"CAPTAIN GORING, let it be distinctly understood that from this day forward your visits to Chilcote cease, and let all this be forgotten," were the words with which Sir Ranald accosted Goring one forenoon.

"Forgotten!" exclaimed the latter, rising from his seat, hat in hand.

Sir Ranald had suddenly come in and found him seated with Alison, paying one of his usual visits, as Goring wished them to be thought, and the old man was greatly ruffled, even exasperated.

"As for my daughter, sir, I forbid her to speak to you again, to recognise you anywhere, to mention your name, or even think of you!" he continued, with increasing vehemence, lashing himself to fresh anger with the sound of his own words. "D—n it, sir, in my younger days the pistol would have put an effectual stop to your uncalled-for interloping."

"Or yours, and your coldness of heart," replied Goring, who was so confounded by this sudden outburst of wrath as scarcely to know what he said.

He was naturally a proud-spirited young fellow, and rather prompt to ire. He blushed scarlet to the temples at these most affronting speeches; but they gave him double pain when he saw the wan, blanched and imploring face of poor Alison, whose

heart was wrung by the words and bearing of her father—a bearing so unlike his own usually cold, stately, and aristocratic self.

At that moment she felt a sort of sickening conviction that all was over between her and Bevil, as if she was being torn from him for ever; and, indeed, separation now was nearer than either of them suspected, for cruel events were fated to follow each other fast.

Goring bowed to father and daughter, just touching the hand of the latter as he withdrew. Sir Ranald turned his back upon him and looked through a window; thus Alison had an opportunity to whisper: "The beeches at eight this evening," and Bevil left Chilcote with his heart swelling with anger, and smarting under a keen sense of insult and regret.

"Oh, papa, can you forget that he saw Ellon laid in his grave?" she was on the point of saying, while choked with tears, when she suddenly remembered that Ellon's ring was now on Goring's finger, and that the latter's engagement ring was on the third finger of her left hand, where her father, in his abstraction, selfishness, and pre-occupation with monetary affairs, had never even once detected it.

And now, truth to tell, though desperate with poverty, the struggle to keep up appearances, and anger to find his purposes crossed, the old man blushed for himself in having so far forgot what was due to a visitor, a guest, and one gentleman to another, but that emotion was not unmixed with one of satisfaction that "the affair," as he thought it, "between Alison and that fellow was over now and for ever."

On this day Alison could not dissemble; she cared not to hide her emotion from him, and let the tears of shame and sorrow pour hotly and bitterly down her cheeks, while he looked grimly on, thinking it would "be all right by-and-by."

If she were to see Bevil no more, was the girl's constant thought—what would become of her?

The hours in which he had no part lagged fearfully with Alison, and to Bevil, when they met, the minutes seemed to be literally winged. Her whole life had lately been divided into two portions, one when she was briefly with Bevil, and the other when she was *not*. Their meetings had become necessary, as it would seem, to their very existence, and, were these ended, both would find their "occupation gone."

They knew not how they got through their days before they loved each other, and had those delicious stolen meetings to

look forward to and look back to, as something sweet, new, and beloved, to con and dream over.

Till the advent of Bevil Goring, how drearily dull her life seemed to have been at Chilcote ! It was all very well to cull and arrange bouquets with all an artist's eye to colour and form, to warble the old songs her mother had taught in brighter days at Essilmont and elsewhere, with all that sweetness which she inherited from her, and vary these occupations by attendance on her fowls and other pets, hunting with old Archie for the eggs when the hens had taken to laying under the hedges ; turning dresses, cleaning her own gloves, and, while longing for the purse of Fortunatus, striving to make sixpence go as far as a shilling, feeling that darning and mending were her purgatory, and economy the bane of her existence ; but into that existence, with the love of Bevil Goring, there had come a ray of brightest sunshine, with a new and hitherto unknown sense of happiness. But, alas ! it would seem they were now to be followed by sorrow, and the gloom of a hopeless night which would have no end.

As the afternoon and evening stole on, Alison's heart beat wildly and anxiously for the time of her meeting—too probably the last one—with Bevil, and after a frugal dinner of cold mutton and boiled rice (a *menu* at which her father made more than one grimace), with old Archie Auchindoir in attendance, solemnly and respectfully, as if it had been some banquet suited to Lucullus, when Sir Ranald began to doze over his bottle of carefully-aired St. Peray "hermitage"—most probably the last he possessed—Alison rose softly from the table and stole into the entrance hall, where the hands on the clock dial indicated that the hour was nearly eight.

She assumed the hat and shawl she usually wore when in the garden, and passing through the latter in her resolution to meet Bevil, almost heedless if her father missed her, she was about to open the gate that led to the beech avenue, when she was startled—rooted to the spot for a moment—by seeing, or fancying she saw, before her, amid the dark and uncertain shadows of the November evening, the blacker outline of a dog—of a hound before her.

At this conviction a gasping cry escaped her, and a sense of suffocation came into her slender throat ; inspired by a courage beyond what she deemed she possessed, she darted forward, but the outline seemed to melt away before her or

elude her eyes. No dog was there, nor could there have been, for no dog of mortal mould could have cleared that lofty wall, and no sound followed the disappearance.

All was still save the drip of the dew, as it fell from the overlaid leaf of an evergreen.

Alison felt her heart beating painfully, while a deadly chill seemed to settle upon it. Had the family boding of evil been before her? Oh, no, no—impossible. And yet it was said that when Ellon and her mother died—— She tried to thrust the thought away.

It must have been, she said to herself, some peculiar arrangement of light and shadow—some shadow formed in the starlight and thrown on the grass; for often as she heard of that Dog of Doom—the Spectre Hound of Essilmont—she always shrank from believing in its existence, but her heart was filled with vague and undefinable apprehension nevertheless.

There was a step on the gravel, a figure appeared in the shade of the star-lighted avenue, and in another moment she was sobbing heavily in Bevil's arms.

Her excessive agitation he attributed, naturally, to the very unpleasant scene of the forenoon, especially when she said: "Oh! Bevil, how, or in what terms, am I to apologise to you for the mode in which papa treated you to-day?"

"Poor old gentleman, I can pardon all his petulance, but it fills me with a fear that he designs you to be the wife of another. Curse upon this poverty of mine, which mars as yet the life of us both, Alison. I have done wrong in loving you and winning you without your father's permission; but he never would have accorded it."

"Oh!" moaned Alison, with her cheek on his breast; "something is about to happen—something terrible about to befall us!"

"Something, darling—what?"

"Death, or a calamity little short of it, perhaps."

"I do not understand you," said Bevil, caressing her with great tenderness, and becoming very anxious on finding how faint her voice was, and how excessively she was trembling. "Dearest Alison, the night air is chill, I am selfish and barbarous in keeping you here."

"Don't say so, my love," murmured the girl, as she nestled close to him, "for something is about to happen, and heaven knows only when I may meet you again."

"What fills you so with apprehension?"

And now, with pale and trembling lips, while reclining in Goring's arms, she told him the family legend, at which he—a man of the period—a young officer within a mile or so of his lines at Aldershot, felt inclined to laugh very heartily, but for Alison's intense dejection, and the doubts and fears incident to their mutual position.

"Dearest Alison," said he, smiling, "you have one *bête noire* assuredly—old Cadbury—don't, for heaven's sake, manufacture and adopt another."

"Bevil, don't jest with me," she said, imploringly.

"I do not jest with you, sweet one; but tell me all about this devilish hound—for such it must be, of course."

It would seem that it first appeared on the night of a dreadful storm, centuries ago—a night when the wind howled and roared round Essilmont, and the Ythan, white and foaming, tore in full flood through the dreary heather glens towards the sea, and when the thunder peals seemed to rend heaven; yet amid all this elemental din the gate-ward at Essilmont heard the baying of a dog at the gate, and, opening it, a large black hound came in, and was permitted to crouch by the hall fire, and when the embers of the latter began to sink and fade away, it was remarked by those who were there that the eyes of the great shaggy hound, as it lay with its long sharp nose resting on its outstretched paws, had in them a strangely diabolical and malicious glitter as they roved from face to face.

"I dislike the aspect of this brute," said the Laird to the Lady of Essilmont, and as he spoke the hound began to lash the floor with his tail. "Let him be driven forth."

"I pray you not," said she. "The poor animal may have lost its master."

On this the hound, as if grateful to her, licked her white hand with his red tongue, and she stroked him tenderly. She was Annot Udney, a daughter of the Laird of Auchterellon, and reputed as a witch, and the possessor of a remarkable magic crystal ball, with which she could work good or evil, but the latter most frequently.

"Annot, its aspect chills me," said the laird again.

"Chills *you*, Ranald?" exclaimed the lady. "You whose spear was foremost in the fray last week at the Red Harlaw."

"Yes—I shudder, and know not why," he replied, and signed himself with the cross; on which the hound instantly snarled, and showed all his white glistening teeth, while his eyes glared like red and fiery carbuncles.

No more was wanting now to prove to Ranald Cheyne that the animal was a thing of evil, so snatching up a halbert he was about to cleave his head when the lady interposed with outstretched arms and a cry of dismay. She was a woman of rare beauty and great sweetness of manner, notwithstanding her evil repute ; so she stayed her husband's arm, and said : " Let me put forth the hound."

" You, Annot ? "

" Yes—I," she replied ; and patting the dog's rough head it rose and followed her to the outer gate, and now the wild storm which shook the walls some time before was over ; it seemed to have spent its fury and passed away

A little time elapsed ; Annot Cheyne did not return : the laird became anxious and impatient, and as all the household were now abed he followed her. The sky was cloudless now, and the white moonlight fell aslant in silvery sheets over the barbican wall, and in the flood of it that streamed through the outer archway he saw his wife caressing the gigantic hound. " Annot ! " cried he, impatiently. She made no answer, but stooped and again caressed the dog. At that moment a dark cloud passed suddenly and quickly over the face of the moon, involving the archway in blackness and obscurity ; and the baying of the hound was heard, but, as it seemed, at a vast distance. When, a minute after, the moon emerged from its shadow, the radiance streamed through the archway as before ; but there was no one visible—the lady and the hound had disappeared.

" She was never seen again," said Alison in conclusion ; " but as for the hound, that came and went with the tempest, it has appeared, or has been said to have done so, when—when evil was near the Cheynes of Essilmont ; and, whether the story of its appearance was fable or fancy, the evil certainly came in some fashion or other."

" It is the offspring of vulgar superstition or fevered fancy. How can you think of such old-world Scotch nonsense in this age, Alison ? " said Bevil Goring.

" If a boding of evil it is, I hope it menaces me, and not poor papa," said Alison, down whose cheeks the unseen tears were streaming in the dark, " and as for Lord Cadbury——"

" Don't speak about him—don't think about him ! " interrupted Bevil, impatiently. " And yet," he added, " if this old fellow loves you, I do not wonder at it,"

"Why?"

"Because all men who know you must love you, though I hope it is to be your destiny, your strength, to love but one. Yet, Alison, what agony it must be to love you as I do, and only to lose you after all."

This unfortunate speech, though meant to be a loving compliment by Goring, seemed but the echo of the forebodings that were in the heart of Alison, and she wept heavily while he strained her to his breast and kissed her, not once but many times, and she hung or lay passive in his embrace like a dead weight, while the hearts of both were full of a kind of passionate despair—their future seemed so much without hope—their present menaced by so much turmoil and opposition.

"My darling, my darling," exclaimed Goring, when at last he released her, "whatever happens I shall never, never give you up."

So they parted at last, to meet at their trysting place on the second day ensuing, and Alison, as she hurried homeward, and passed amid the dark shadows of the star-lighted garden, looked fearfully round her with dilated eyes, while her spirit quailed in dread of seeing defined through the gloom what she saw, or thought she saw, before, and hastened into the house, closing the door softly, yet swiftly behind her, as if pursued by something unseen.

Duty detained Goring at the camp during the intervening day, but on the following, full of more lover-like anxiety than ever, with a hundred things to say, to ask, and to hear, hopes to suggest, and comforting speeches to make, he sought the beeches, and waited there till all hope died out.

Alison did not come; the day was cold; the wind bleak and keen as the very last of the damp brown leaves were swept away with it, and at last he turned aside with a heavy heart.

The next day and the next brought the same result. She failed to meet him, and dismay filled his heart lest she might be ill. She was delicate and fragile, and the last night they met she was terribly shaken and excited by the untoward episode of the morning and her superstitious terror of the evening.

From the moment Bevil Goring met and knew Alison Cheyne, his heart had gone out of his own keeping, and never returned to it again. His love for her had become deep and intense, but, strange to say, did not seem a hopeful one, unless fortune changed suddenly with him. It was useless to expect it would do so with her family now.

His position was good; his family name unimpeachable. He bore a high reputation in his regiment as a brave and well-trained officer, and one well used to command; but his means were certainly not what he should ask a wife of Alison's culture to share, nor in any way were they equal to the ambition and dire necessities of the bankrupt baronet of Essilmont.

After some more days of agonising delay and anxiety, Goring resolved to proceed to Chilcote House, and endeavour to discover if aught ailed Alison, or how it was that she had ceased to come to their meeting-place as usual.

From the clustered and ivy-clad chimneys no smoke ascended against the grey November sky. Every window was shuttered and closed. There was an absence of all stir—an oppressive silence everywhere in and around the house—even from the little court where the clucking of Alison's hens was wont to be heard. A spade yet remained stuck in a plot of the garden, as if old silver-haired Archie Auchindoir had suddenly quitted his work there and returned no more.

Either by the result of mischief, or recent neglect, a large mass of the ivy and clematis that overhung the pretty little oaken porch had fallen down, and, if further evidence of total desertion were necessary, a large white ticket on a pole announced in black letters that the "commodious villa of Chilcote was to let, furnished or unfurnished. Communications to be made in writing to Mr. Solomon Slagg, St. Clement's Lane, City."

On taking in all these details of a sudden, hasty, and perhaps disastrous departure, the heart of Bevil seemed to stand still for some seconds.

Where had the little household gone, and why? And why did not Alison write to him of her movements? though he could not have replied without compromising her. Was Sir Ranald dead? Was she? Oh, no! no! He must have heard it—friends in camp must have heard through the public prints of any catastrophe.

She was gone—carried off; he could not doubt it—but whither and to what end he could not even surmise; his bower of roses—his fool's paradise, was levelled in the dust at last, and he could but linger, and look hopelessly and questioningly at the ticket of Mr. Solomon Slagg, and at the darkened windows through which Alison must often have looked, perhaps watching for his own approach.

He wrote to Mr. Slagg for information and Sir Ranald's

address, but received no answer (doubtless Mr. Slagg was acting under the orders of Lord Cadbury), save printed circulars, from which it appeared that Mr. Slagg was ready to advance "money confidentially to young officers and others on easy terms, borrowers' own security, repayments at convenience, etc. etc."

It was terrible for Bevil Goring to surrender those hopes he had been cherishing in the depths of his heart—hopes that, though of recent growth, were strong, and dear, and precious, and the realisation of which had become his daily prayer.

A darkness as sudden seemed to have fallen upon him !

He remembered now all the poor girl's painful forebodings on that last eventful night that *something was about to happen*—the surely absurd story about the spectre dog, which he had so affectionately derided ; but now "something" certainly *had* come to pass ! And what was it ?

CHAPTER XV.

EVIL TIDINGS.

"I'm glad to see you back, Miss Cheyne," said Archie, as she met him in the passage or entrance-hall ; "Sir Ranald has missed you sairly."

"Missed me ? I left him asleep, Archie," exclaimed Alison.

"Something wakened him wi' a start, just as ye gaed into the garden."

"Something—what ?"

"A sound, I watna what," replied Archie, unwillingly, smoothing his silver hair with his hand, and looking round him stealthily.

"What sound ? I heard nothing in the garden."

"Weel, something like the baying o' a hound."

"A *hound* !" said Alison, faintly.

"I dinna quite say sae ; but say naething to Sir Ranald about it. Gang to him at aince ; he's got some unco news, I fear, by the evening post."

Walking like an automaton, though very pale, and tremulous in heart and limb, Alison entered the dining-room, where she found her father walking up and down its entire length, with a letter crushed and crumpled in his thin white hand, which was nervously clenched upon it. His face was very pale ; his lips were twitching, and drops of perspiration stood upon his brow.

"Papa!" exclaimed Alison, winding her soft arms round him; "what is the matter with you?"

"It has come at last, child."

"What has come?"

"The long-impending and utter ruin, unless—unless——"

"What?"

"You will save me; end my sorrows, and your own, by accepting Cadbury. You can lift from my heart and our family the shadow that has darkened them so long—the cold shadow of grinding poverty."

Her lips became white and parched—so parched that she had to moisten them with her tongue, and even then she could not speak for a time. Bevil Goring's kisses were fresh upon them, and now she had to listen to a death sentence like this!

Her first dread had been a reference to her absence at such a time, but, by the business in question, it was evident her ramble in the dusk was forgotten, or a very subordinate matter indeed.

"A man named Slagg has written me," said Sir Ranald, in a low and faint voice, while leaning with one hand on the table and the other pressed on the region of the heart, "written me to the effect that all my recent and too often renewed acceptances and promissory notes have come—how, I know not—into his possession, and that if I do not liquidate them forthwith everything we have—even to the chairs we sit on—will be seized, and myself too probably arrested, while you, Alison—you, my beloved Ailie," he continued, with sudden pathos in his voice—"will have neither house nor home!"

He was a proud man, Sir Ranald Cheyne, and apart from the selfishness peculiar to many of his class—especially in Scotland—an honourable man. Thus it is but fair to infer that had he known or been aware in the least degree of the game Lord Cadbury was playing, and that the letter of Solomon Slagg was his trump card, he would rather have faced ruin and beggary than urged this odious marriage on his daughter.

The latter clasped her hands in silence and looked and felt like a hunted creature. Prior to this she had often thought over the means of escape, of working for her bread—a mode of work of which she had very vague ideas indeed—but now she felt stunned and stupefied.

After all—after the dawn and noon of the sweet day that

had stolen upon her—could she do nothing, if she was to serve her father, but to marry this vulgar lord?

"I have refused Lord Cadbury's written proposal, papa," said she, in a voice so low that it sounded like a whisper.

"He will renew it, and it is a brilliant offer, Alison. He will be kind to you—so kind, Alison—and you—you will not be so mad as to refuse him now. Think of his proffered settlements and of what we—what I owe him."

"Think of every one, of all—all but myself and my future!" said Alison, with her slender fingers interlaced above her head and her eyes cast despairingly upward.

"She is yielding," thought Sir Ranald; "but I see how it is—this fellow Goring is in our way."

Then he put his arm around her caressingly, and said: "The sooner you become sensible, Alison, and forget your foolish—your most unwise fancy for that young fellow at Aldershot, and better for yourself and for—me."

He never forgot *himself* with all his love for his daughter.

"But, papa," she said with pallid lips, "I love—Bevil."

"It has come to this—an engagement?"

"Yes, papa, I cannot deceive you."

"An engagement—a secret one—without my knowledge; how dared you?"

"I promised to wait for a year—he asked me only a year—and he loves me so much!"

"No doubt," snarled Sir Ranald, through his set teeth. "People cannot live on love, however, and your friend 'Bevil,' as you call him, cannot pay my debts."

"Oh, would that he could do so!"

"Till recently you have always been accustomed to luxury and ease. These Cadbury lays at your feet, offering you—who by position and education are unfit to be a poor man's wife—absolute splendour."

"But Bevil is not so poor as you think, and, moreover, may be richer in time," urged Alison, piteously; "he has prospects, expectations——"

"Of course—what sharper is without them?—and for the realisation of these visions you would be waiting to the sacrifice of your youth, your beauty, and your poor old father's few remaining years."

She wrung her white hands. She had often thought before of the tradesmen's unpaid bills—of her dresses made to do duty

for a second season she had never thought at all ; but now the letter of Slagg had filled her with vague and undefinable terror.

She could not, poor girl, understand the tenor of it altogether, but she knew it meant ruin, for she could read that in her father's anxious face ; yet why should fate compel her to marry Lord Cadbury?—she could work—work or die !

“Loving Bevil as I do, papa, it would be very base of me to accept Lord Cadbury without even an atom of respect or gratitude,” said she, gathering courage from her very despair, while her eyes streamed with tears.

“I do not see that love has much to do with marriage, but know that money has a great deal,” said her father, smoothing out the letter of Solomon Slagg for re-perusal. “Love is a luxury the poor can't afford, and it is better to marry on a little of it, and find that little increase by residence together and force of habit, than marry on much, and find that much dwindling away into mutual toleration and cold indifference.”

Sir Ransald had not an atom of sympathy with or toleration for this love fancy, so he deemed it, of his daughter. His own lover-days and his marriage seemed to have come to pass so long ago as to have belonged to some state of pre-existence. He could scarcely realise them now ; yet he knew they must have been ; Burke and Debrett told him so ; and Alison was there is a living proof of both ; but his love—if love it was—had been a well-ordered arrangement with a lady of good position and ample means, not with an obscure nobody.

“Papa,” said Alison, after a silence that had been broken only by her sighs and his own, “when urging me to do what you wish, have you no thought of the long line of the Cheynes of Essilmont, who lived there for so many centuries—who so often lost their lives in battle, but never honour, who never stained their name by any base or ignoble transaction, who lived and died so spotlessly?”

This little outburst was something precisely after his own heart ; he patted Alison's head of rich brown hair, and said, with a kindling in his eyes : “It is precisely because I *do* think of them that I wish to see you wealthy and ennobled, raised out of this now sordid life of ours.”

“Ennobled by wedding the son of Timothy Titcomb, of Threadneedle Street !”

“If you will not save me by doing so, we have nothing left for it now but a disgraceful flight.”

"Flight?"

"Yes; I must quit this place ere I am arrested."

"For where?"

"God alone knows."

Alison interlaced her fingers again in mute misery.

"You look worn and weary, Alison," said Sir Ranald, observing the pinched expression of her little white face.

"I am both indeed!"

"Then go to bed, child; think over all I have urged, think of what is before us, think well, and give a final answer in the morning."

She kissed him with lips that were cold and quivering, and retired to her room, while he threw open his bureau, drew the lamp towards him, spread a sheet of paper with a vague idea that he was about to make some monetary calculations, and mechanically dipped a pen in the ink-bottle.

Then he threw it down, and, resting his aching head upon his delicate and wrinkled hands, sank into a kind of stupor of thought.

From this he was roused by a hand being laid gently on his shoulder, and by the voice of old Archie Auchindoir saying, as he shook his white head: "Puir Sir Ranald—oh! my dear maister; eild and poortith are sair burdens for ae back."

"What do you want, Archie?" he asked peevishly.

"Sir Ranald, sir, I've a sma' matter o' three hunder pound and mair saved up in your service, and at your service it is now, every bodle o'd—tak' it and welcome; it may help ye at this pinch—tak' it, for God's sake, if it will tak' the tears frae Miss Alison's een."

"Poor Archie, I thank you," said Sir Ranald, shaking the hand of this faithful old man, whose eyes were inflamed with the tears he was, perhaps, too aged to shed; "it is very generous of you, this offer, but is—pardon me saying it—simply absurd!"

Again and again Archie pressed the little sum in vain upon the acceptance of his master, till the pride of the latter turned his gratitude into something of his usual hauteur, on which Archie withdrew sorrowfully, muttering under his breath: "Troth, he's weel boden there ben, that will neither borrow nor lend."

Meaning that Sir Ranald must surely be well enough off, if he could afford to dispense with all assistance.

With her gorgeous brown hair unrolled and floating over her shoulders, Alison, with her hands lying listlessly in her lap, sat lost in her own terrible thoughts, with her tear-inflamed eyes gazing into her bed-room fire, which had just attained that clear, red light, without flickering flame, in which one may fancy strange scenes without end—deep valleys, caverns, rocks, castles perched on cliffs, faces, profiles; and therein had she seen, more than once, Essilmont with its Scoto-French turrets, with its conical roofs and vanes, its crow-stepped gables and massive chimneys, that she now might never see in reality again!

A victim on the double altar of gold and filial piety.

How often had she read in novels and romances, and how often had she seen on the stage, the story of a heroine—a wretched girl placed in precisely the cruel predicament in which she now found herself, and deemed that such dramatic and doleful situations could only exist in the fancies of the author or of the playwright!

Without, the cold and wintry wind had torn away the last leaves from every tree long since; the last flowers were also long dead; the chill night rain pattered, with sleet and hail, upon the windows; and, like the heart of Alison, all nature seemed desolate and sad.

She shuddered when she heard the moaning of the wind, and thought of the Spectre Hound. Could it be that she had indeed seen it?

CHAPTER XVI.

CADBURY'S PLAN OR PLOT.

AND now to relate what more came to pass at Chilcote, and where Alison had vanished to.

The morning came to her after a sleepless night, and she was incapable of giving the answer to which Sir Ranald had hopefully looked forward. She was in a species of mental fever. So passed the day—the day she knew that she could not meet Bevil—and the short winter evening was passing into another night, when the ringing of the door bell gave her a kind of electric shock, so thoroughly was her whole nervous system shaken.

The hour was a dark and gloomy one ; snowflakes were falling athwart the dreary landscape of leafless trees, and the north wind moaned sadly round old Chilcote and its giant beeches, with a wail that seemed consonant with disasters impending there, when Lord Cadbury arrived, by chance as it seemed, but in reality to see the effect of the bomb he had fired from the office of Mr. Solomon Slagg, in St. Clement's Lane.

The curtains had been drawn over the windows by the tiny little hands of Daisy Prune ; a coal fire blazed pleasantly in the grate, and threw a ruddy glow over all the panelled room and the family portraits, particularly on those of the two Cavalier brothers, looking so proud and defiant in their gorgeous costume, that ere long would be finding their way to the brokers in Wardour Street or elsewhere.

Sir Ranald and Alison sat alone—alone in their misery—when the peer came jauntily in, and took in the whole situation at a glance—the poor girl, with all her rare beauty, looking utterly disconsolate ; the bankrupt father, with all his pride, looking utterly desperate !

Alison was seated, or rather crouching, on a black bearskin rug by Sir Ranald's side—one arm thrown caressingly over his knees, and she was in the act of touching his wrinkled hand with hers with a fondness pretty to see, and then he stooped to take her face between them both and looked into her blue-grey eyes wistfully.

They formed a lovely picture, but it touched not the heart of my Lord Cadbury of Cadbury Court.

The bezique cards lay on the table close by, where old Archie had placed them as usual ; but they were unnoticed now. Father and daughter were quite past playing their quiet game together.

Alison, as if the visitor's presence was to her insupportable, arose, and muttering some excuse, she knew not what, withdrew to her own room.

In Sir Ranald's eyes there was a passionate and despairing expression of pain that wrung the very soul of Alison ; but still, she thought, why should the love of her youth, and why should *her* whole future life be sacrificed for one who had enjoyed *his* long life to the full, and all because her grandfather had been, like her father, a spendthrift.

Cadbury took in the whole situation ; all that he anticipated had come to pass ; the result was exactly what he had foreseen,

and he now hoped that he would be able to triumph over Alison, whose repugnance for him piqued his pride and excited his revenge.

"What is the matter, Cheyne—you look seriously unwell?" said he, with well-feigned interest.

"You find me a sorely broken man," replied Sir Ranald, in a hollow voice, as he took the hand of his visitor and begged him to be seated. "Ruin has overtaken me at last, Cadbury."

"I think I can guess," said the latter, tugging at his long white moustaches; "but tell me in what form."

In a few words, but with intense shame and mortification of spirit, Sir Ranald told of Slagg's threatening letter, and of all that his listener had been aware of days before.

"And these acceptances must be met?"

"But how, Cadbury—how? I might as well attempt to make a river run up a hill."

"What is before you?" asked the peer, a cunning smile twinkling in his eyes, unseen by his visitor.

"Death or disgrace!"

"Disgrace in what fashion?"

"Arrest or flight."

Cadbury continued to pull each of his moustaches in a kind of nervous way, and after a minute's silence he said, with a kind of laugh: "I think I can help you."

"I am not a man who has been used to seek help from others," said Sir Ranald, with a little of his old pride of bearing.

Lord Cadbury coughed and smiled as he thought of more than one cheque given to the speaker, and by the latter apparently forgotten.

"Under this terrible pressure, have you spoken of my proposal to—to Miss Cheyne?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yes."

"And with what result—for she knows what I can do, if I choose?"

"None—none!"

"Even to save you, she will not marry me?"

"No."

"No!"

"At least, I have totally failed to extract an answer from her."

Lord Cadbury's ferret-like eyes flashed; he actually ground his teeth and clenched his coarse, vulgar hands. "Look here,

Cheyne—if I take up your paper and pay Slagg, could you not force her—I say, force——”

“Hush—she might fall ill and die, as her mother died, of a decline,” groaned Sir Ranald.

“Oh! not a bit, not a bit,” said Cadbury; “but change of air will do her good. Let us get her out of this place, any-way.”

“The fact is, she has a fancy for that Infantry fellow, Bevil Goring, at Aldershot,” said Sir Ranald, who carefully omitted to state that Alison had admitted her engagement.

“The devil—but I don’t need to be told that,” exclaimed Cadbury, angrily; “yet we must eradicate that fancy, and sharply, too.”

“But how?”

“Take her over to the Continent. Let us get her on board my yacht, with you as her protector, and all will come right in the end.—And I’ll leave *you* ashore somewhere when you least suspect it,” was Cadbury’s concluding thought.

“But these bills that Slagg holds——”

“Are not in his possession now.”

“In whose, then?” asked Sir Ranald, with fresh alarm.

“In *mine*.”

“Yours?”

“Yes—look here.”

Cadbury opened his pocket-book and laid before the startled eyes of Sir Ranald eight or nine bills and promissory notes, all of which he knew but too well.

“How comes this pass?” he asked, with a bewildered air, as he passed a hand across his forehead.

“I know Solomon Slagg. I knew him to my cost ere I came to the title. You mentioned that he had acceptances of yours. I got them all up, and trust that in quietude Alison will end this nonsense and become Lady Cadbury.”

Sir Ranald shook his head and sank back in his chair.

“If I put these papers in the fire, will you stick to my plan of getting her on board my yacht, and leaving the rest to time and to me?” asked Cadbury, in a voice that intensity rendered husky.

“Yes,” replied Sir Ranald, in a faint voice, while eyeing the fatal documents as if they had serpent-like fascination for him.

“Your hand upon it.”

Sir Ranald put his cold, thin hand in the peer’s rough and

pudgy one, and in another moment the documents were vanishing in the fire.

Sir Ranald seemed as one in a dream ; he could scarcely believe his senses, and that he was thus freed from those encumbrances, the sudden destruction of which had not been a part of Cadbury's plan on the day he visited Slagg, but was an after-thought to produce a species of dramatic situation, and win, perhaps, through fear or gratitude, what Alison would never accord him from love.

He had now, he thought—for he well knew his man—secured the livelong gratitude and trust of her father ; and through her filial love of the latter, and the peril which she would still be led to suppose was menacing him, he would attain the means of getting her away and controlling her movements.

It is an old aphorism which says with truth that a man is usually more inclined to feel kindly towards one on whom he has conferred favours than to one from whom he has received them ; thus, barely had Sir Ranald seen the last of his blue paper shrivel up in the flames, and thus felt a load lifted off his mind, when his natural sense of gratitude jarred with his equally natural constitutional pride, which revolted at the idea of being favoured or protected by any man.

However, they mutually resolved, after Sir Ranald had poured forth his expressions of gratitude, with promises to refund whenever it was in his power to do so, that Alison should be kept in ignorance of what had been done with the bills till they had her on board the yacht, when they both hoped to count upon *her* gratitude ; and now, when the pressure of the present danger had passed away, Sir Ranald felt more than ever annoyance, even rage, at his daughter's folly and obstinacy—folly in permitting herself to be swayed by a regard for Goring, and obstinacy in declining the proposal of Cadbury.

"And now that is arranged," said the latter, "I'll telegraph to Tom Llanyard to get the *Firefly* into Southampton Water. We can take the train at Basingstoke and be off to-morrow, bag and baggage. Pension off or pay off that old Scotch fellow, Auchindoir—he is not worth his salt, and would only be in the way on board the *Firefly* ; ditto with old Prune your housekeeper. We'll take Daisy with us, however, as Alison must have a maid ; and, until we are at sea, watch well that she has no means of posting letters."

Now that the keen and aching sense of immediate danger

had passed away, or been replaced by gratitude and thankfulness, Sir Ranald's spirit, in addition to his annoyance with Alison, writhed under the part he found himself compelled to act, in silently permitting Lord Cadbury to direct his daughter's movements and to arrange their household matters.

But now the packing and preparations for departure began that very night, and were resumed with fresh energy on the following day, Alison toiling with a will in the selection of her father's wardrobe and her own. Alas ! there was but little in either of them to make the selection difficult, sorrow for the sudden separation from Goring on one hand being tempered on the other by a belief that immediate departure alone could save Sir Ranald from the peril that menaced him but yesterday ; and so closely was she watched, and so much were her movements hampered, that she was totally without an opportunity for writing or dispatching even the smallest note to Aldershot.

"And sae you're gaun awa', and without me?" said Archie, rather reproachfully, to Sir Ranald.

"Yes ; from here, certainly."

"Where to?"

"God knows where to," was the absent response.

"Back to Essilmont, maybe?"

"In time, perhaps, Archie ; in time, but not now," said Sir Ranald, with a bitter sigh.

"Tak' tent, Sir Ranald ; for gudesake gang hooly. Dinna wade if ye canna see the bottom," resumed Archie, in a low and confidential voice ; "and beware ye o' that Lord Cadbury. I ken a spune frae a stot's horn as weel as maist men, and I distrust him sairly."

"That I do not. He has just been a good friend to me, Archie ; and now a word in your ear—when I want advice from you concerning my friends or my affairs, I shall condescend to ask it."

The old servitor looked abashed and crushed. He bowed very low, and withdrew in silence.

At last the hour of departure came, and Lord Cadbury's carriage and a light luggage-van were at the door ; and, ere Alison was assisted into the former, she shook old Archie's hand, and then with a sudden impulse kissed his cheek, for she had known Archie from her infancy. Thus he seemed to her as a part and parcel of Essilmont ; and, when the carriage rolled

away with her in it, the old man lifted up his hands and voice and wept as only the aged and the hopeless weep.

"Poor girl!" thought Cadbury, with a grimace, when after a time there came a distant view of Aldershot with its camp of huts, its church spire, and Twesildown Hill, "she'll hold, I suppose, for a time, to her little rag of fidelity—her promise to that fellow Goring in the infantry lines; but, *faute de mieux*, we shall cure her of that. We shall see what we shall see, when an hour on board the *Firefly*."

Well did Alison know where Aldershot lay, but, conscious that her tormentor's keen eyes were upon her, she turned hers away and gazed steadily in the opposite direction.

"I thought I had bidden good-bye to the world, Cadbury," said Sir Ranald, with the nearest approach to a smile Alison had seen on his thin, worn face for some time past; "and here I am about to see it again in your yacht. Alison will require some additions to her wardrobe, I fear, but we have no time for that; and though she has Daisy for her attendant, I should like her also to have the society of some lady friend—do you know of one?"

Cadbury looked perplexed.

"What need of a lady friend or chaperon when you, her own father, are with her? Besides, we are close run for time, and Llanyard awaits us at Southampton," he replied, almost with irritation.

"I have been engaged in many little affairs," he grumbled in thought, as he recalled the burned bills and the enormous cost, "but never in a 'love-chase' so expensive as this! I am in for it now, however, and may as well go through with it; and what will the clubs say when they hear that I am off to see the Continent with old Cheyne's pretty daughter?"

The veteran lover chuckled in his vanity at this, and, ideas of marriage apart, he actually began to scheme how he might "drop" Sir Ranald somewhere on the Continent, compromise the girl in some way, and thus revenge himself on her and Goring too.

He had scarcely made up his mind yet in what direction to sail at that inclement season, but, wherever it was, *another* route would be announced in the papers, to throw adventurous lovers off the scent.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE MYSTERY.

BEVIL GORING was greatly perplexed and bewildered by the sudden disappearance of the household at Chilcote, and in quest of information rode over to Mrs. Trelawney at the Grange, who expressed herself as much surprised as himself at their abrupt departure, but she knew only a little more on the subject than he did.

The baronet and his daughter had left England in Lord Cadbury's yacht the *Firefly* several days ago.

"Gone! sailed thus suddenly without a letter of explanation, of farewell, or the time of her return being even hinted to me," were Goring's natural thoughts. "And what about Lord Cadbury?" he asked.

"Oh! he has gone too; the Court is shut up," replied Mrs. Trelawney, with a faint approach to a smile.

"Gone too!" replied Goring, more mystified than ever.

Was she yielding to the pressure put upon her by Sir Ranald—yielding after all?

"And for where has the party sailed?" he asked.

"There is no party on board, I understand, but only Lord Cadbury, Alison, and her father; and whither they have gone no one knows—they decamped so hurriedly. But *you*, at least, will certainly hear in time," said Mrs. Trelawney, with a soft smile, as she knew well how deep was the interest Goring and Miss Cheyne had in each other.

"I am indeed surprised that—that Alison did not write about the whole affair to me."

"Perhaps she did not know in time, or her letter may not have been—may have from some cause miscarried. So whether they are seeking the fjords of Norway or the source of the Nile, we cannot know."

"And who was your informant so far, Mrs. Trelawney?"

"Old Mrs. Rebecca Prune, who came with a farewell message from Alison to me—a circumstance which I thought strange, as courtesy required that she should have called, or at least written."

"And there was none for me?"

"None. I assure you, Captain Goring, I miss Alison very much, and so does my child here, little Netty."

"Ah—little Netty, whose 'flower-like beauty,' as he calls it, Dalton is never weary praising."

Mrs. Trelawney's colour heightened for a moment, her long lashes flickered, but she merely said: "How is Captain Dalton? I have not seen him for some time."

"Very well—but low-spirited apparently," replied Goring, who thought that she seemed interested in poor Tony after all. After a pause—"Dalton is my dearest friend, Mrs. Trelawney, and, as the confidant of his secrets, he has not concealed from me his deep admiration and love of yourself."

Mrs. Trelawney's bright hazel eyes sparkled, and her bosom heaved, while an undoubtedly joyous expression spread over all her animated face.

"You will pardon me for saying this, when I know that you are the friend of Alison Cheyne, whom I love with my whole life, and shall follow over the world if I can trace her!" said Goring, whose voice trembled with emotion that sprang from love and anger.

"I do love sweet Alison very dearly."

"And poor Dalton," said Goring, anxious to plead his friend's cause: "can you not love him as he deserves to be?"

"I have not said so," replied Mrs. Trelawney, now laughing excessively, and added, "what an odd question for a gentleman visitor!"

"Do pardon me; but will you give him time to hope—through me?"

"Please not to suggest this, Captain Goring."

"Why?"

"There is—I know—a secret in his life—he knows it too—a secret that in some measure fetters alike his words and his actions."

"Good heavens! and this secret?"

"Is mine also—I have the key to it."

"Yours!"

"Yes—you look perplexed—even distressed; nevertheless it is so," she rejoined, tapping the floor, as if impatient, with a slim and pretty foot.

"Will it ever be unravelled?"

"Yes—very soon now, perhaps."

"But when?"

"When the proper time comes. Till then, Captain Goring, I shall trust to your friendship for myself and Captain Dalton

not to attempt to probe it, or act the umpire or match-maker between us."

She said this emphatically, and with one of her sweetest smiles, while her soft white hand was placed confidently in that of Goring.

"I shall be silent as the grave," said he. "I have suspected something of this kind. At times a great gloom comes over poor Tony; there has been some mystery about his early life—what, I cannot divine; but it drove him into the ranks, and made him for years loathe England and English society, which he avoided as much as possible. He seems to have got over that whim now, and to you I look forward as the means of effecting a perfect cure."

She gave Goring one of her soft and inexplicable smiles, and then, drooping her eyelids said, with a sigh, but apparently one of pleasure: "You expect too much from me, Captain Goring."

Mrs. Trelawney promised him, the moment she could obtain, through any source, some tidings of Alison's whereabouts, to let him know, and he bade her adieu with his mind full of doubt and anxiety—not doubt of Alison's faith, but of their mutual future; and anxiety for the annoyances to which she might be subjected, and the pressure that might in many ways be put upon her.

That Cadbury was in her society was an irritating circumstance; but a peer of the realm was some one of consequence, and his movements would ere long most probably be a clue to hers.

Mrs. Trelawney's mysterious hints about her knowledge of Dalton's past life gave Goring some food for reflection, and he knew not what to think of them.

"So—she seems to have refused Tony, as she did Jerry Wilmot; by Jove, she must be difficult to please!" thought he, as he turned his horse in the direction of Aldershot, often giving a long, earnest, and hopeless farewell glance at the old trysting-place beside the beeches.

But Jerry by this time had quite got over his fancy for Mrs. Trelawney, and found a new divinity in the person of her friend, Miss Bella Chevenix, whom he had known from her girlhood, but who now became invested with new and sudden interest to him.

Days passed slowly in succession now, but to Goring there

came no tidings of the absent one. Thus life in the winter camp at Aldershot became an intolerable bore to him, and he longed for action of any kind; but now rumours went abroad that troubles were in store at the Cape, and the regiment would be one of the first dispatched to Africa.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILMOTHURST.

HIS changed mood of mind did not escape the attention of his friend Jerry Wilmot, who said to him one day: "My people at Wilmothurst are getting up a spread, or a dinner, or both, in honour of my august appearance in this world some five and-twenty years ago. Get leave with me from the colonel, and we'll start by train from Farnborough. Tell your man to throw your things together; O'Farrel is packing mine, and I am just going to the orderly-room about it."

Goring agreed to this. The colonel readily granted a few weeks' leave to both, as the spring drills were a long way off, or the alternate mud and dust of the Long Valley were not sufficiently deep for military manoeuvres; and they started for Wilmothurst, which was situated in one of the prettiest and most wooded parts of Hampshire, Goring being glad of anything that drew him from his own thoughts and aided him to kill the harassing time.

Jerry's man secured their seats and saw their luggage duly placed in the van.

"Now, O'Farrel," said he, as the latter saluted and retired, "don't get drunk at the 'Tumble-down-Dick,' or you'll never be the Sultan of Turkey."

Farnborough Station was soon left far behind; Fleet, with its pond and moorlands; Winchfield, Basingstoke, with its market and town-hall. The carriage from Wilmothurst met them at a station some miles eastward of Salisbury, and the short winter evening saw them deposited at the *porte-cochère* of the stately modern mansion, which occupied the site of an ancient one, and of which Jerry was the lord and owner.

"A fine place this, Jerry," exclaimed Goring, as they alighted; "the grounds are beautiful."

"Yes, but the devil of it is that the lands are mortgaged, I

believe, to an awful extent ; my father was a man of expensive habits and tastes. The old lady *ma mère* hopes, nay, never doubts, that I shall, with my handsome figure and rare accomplishments, pick up an heiress, as if such prizes were to be found like pips on every hedge ; but I have my own fancy to consult in the matter of marriage."

And Jerry laughed softly as he looked at his watch and added : "Now to dress for dinner, and then I shall introduce you to the ladies in the drawing-room."

Jerry had, during the last few weeks, especially since his fancy for Mrs. Trelawney had been cooled by her laughing repulse of his suit, gone much after Bella Chevenix, a former flame, wherever he had met her—a young lady of whom we shall have much to tell anon—but, as yet, he had given no token of his actual feeling towards her, save a rather marked attention, which she, knowing the views, the necessities, and, more than all, the general bearing of Lady Julia Wilmot towards herself—had never in any way encouraged.

Goring followed up the stately, richly-carpeted, and warmly-lighted staircase the valet, who conducted him to his room, where he found his clothes already unpacked, his evening costume placed on a clothes-rail before a blazing fire, and, as he turned to the great mirror and magnificent toilette table, he thought, with a repining sigh, if something like these luxurious surroundings of which Jerry made so light were his, how different might be the fate or fortune of his engagement with Alison Cheyne.

With soldier-like rapidity he and Jerry made the necessary changes in their costume ; the latter tapped at his door, and together they descended to the spacious drawing-room, before the blazing fire in which, at the end of a long vista, apparently of pictures, pilasters, and window-draperies, two ladies were seated.

Lady Julia Wilmot (she was an earl's daughter) received them with a stately grace peculiar to herself, but she was too well-bred to display the least warmth of manner ; and Jerry kissed her cheek, then her firm, white hand, and, after introducing "Goring of Ours," saluted his pretty cousin.

Lady Julia was a fine-looking woman past her fortieth year, but still very handsome, her complexion brilliantly pure, her face and forehead without a line, for thought and care had been alike unknown to her since she left her cradle. Her delicately-

pencilled black eyebrows and general outline of features were decidedly what are deemed aristocratic, and she gave her hand to Goring, while receiving somewhat frigidly Jerry's kiss upon her white cheek.

She was not emotional evidently, and deemed that any exhibition of pleasure on seeing her only son after an absence of a few months would be "bad form."

Emily Wilmot was decidedly a pretty girl, with blond hair, light blue eyes, a rather *retroussé* nose, a cherub-like mouth and dazzling skin.

"My cousin Emily," said Jerry, "Goring of Ours. I hope you will be great friends; but be careful, Emmy. Bevil is our regimental lady-killer—has passed the Guards' School of Instruction in the science of flirtation."

"Absurd as ever, Jerry," said his pretty cousin, tapping his hand with her feather fan, but beginning a conversation at once with Goring.

Aware that Jerry would arrive that day about dinner-time, Cousin Emily had made her toilette with unusual care. She wore a rich black silk trimmed with amber satin; ruffles of rich old lace fell around her tapered arms that were white as a lily, and made the delicate lace seem quite yellow. Bracelets of topazes clasped her slender wrists. The colours chosen became the blond character of her beauty—for she was more than pretty—and yet the whole costume, though rather extreme, was not too much for a family dinner.

During the progress of the latter, which was protracted by an infinity of *entrées* and courses, yet was perfect in all its details, the quartette, on whom the butler and two tall valets were in attendance, found plenty to talk of. The expected departure of the regiment and other troops to the scene of a coming war in Africa; the last run with the Royal Buckhounds; the county news; the coming ball; who were invited, and who were *not*, as ineligible; and some of the conversation on this mooted point reminded Bevil Goring of the proclivities of Sir Ranald Cheyne, as also did the amount of heraldry displayed on plate, the china, and everything, from the great silver *épergne* to the fruit knives, but it was precisely the same with Lord Cadbury, the man of yesterday.

Here, however, it was "the genuine article;" on a *fesse* three eagles' heads and as many escalop shells, gules, crested with the eagle's head of Wilmot, given to the first of the name,

Wyliamot, who, according to Dugdale, was settled antecedent to the Conquest in Nottinghamshire, though, unfortunately for Dugdale's veracity, the science of heraldry was unknown in England till long after that event.

"Mr. Chevenix wishes to see you on some important business to-morrow, Jerry," said Lady Wilmot, when the dessert was over and the servants had withdrawn.

"All right, mater; I'll ride over to-morrow probably—nay, certainly. Try the Burgundy, Goring; there are Romanée, Conti, and Chablis before you."

"The latter—thanks, Jerry."

"Miss Chevenix is at home just now," observed Lady Wilmot, with a furtive glance at her son.

"I know; she returned, or was to return, yesterday."

"You seem well aware of her movements; but of what interest are they to you, Jerry?"

"Every pretty girl's movements are of interest to me," replied Jerry, laughing.

There was a mischievous pout on Cousin Emily's pouting lips, that were like two rosebuds; but his mother's curled slightly with disdain.

"She is handsome, certainly," said Jerry emphatically; "I appeal to Goring that she is."

"And rather good style, considering her origin," added Lady Wilmot.

"Well, it is better surely to be all that than plain."

"*Cela dépend*," laughed Cousin Emily; "it makes no difference to me."

But Jerry knew that it *did* make a difference; however, he said: "You, Emily, may well afford to hear any woman praised."

"But what can Mr. Chevenix want with you, Jerry?" asked Lady Julia.

"Can't say, mater dear—business or some such bother, of course."

"People of his class should wait till they are sent for."

"His class?"

"Well, he is only a village attorney."

"A very fine old man, who has had many business transactions with the governor before my time."

"Slang again, Jerry! Does he pick up all that kind of thing in barracks, Captain Goring?"

"Very probably ; it is the style of the day," replied Goring, laughing.

"It is a very bad style, Jerry dear," said Emily gently.

"Yes, I repeat," said the hostess haughtily, "that persons like Chevenix should not send for their superiors, but wait till they are sent for."

"Like Chevenix? How you run on, mother! One would think that the old days of sitting below the salt had come again!" exclaimed Jerry, with a somewhat ruffled air. "As the world goes now, how long do you think this vast distinction of class and class will last? Why, nobility itself will one day pass away—nay, respect for it is nearly a thing of the past already."

"Nobility pass away!" exclaimed Lady Julia, the descendant of twenty earls and more, her pale face growing paler at such unheard-of opinion. "Where *have* you picked up such horrid Radical and Communistic ideas, Jerry? Not in the army, surely!"

"I pick them up from the public prints, yet don't endorse them. But to me it seems that all will go in time, and quietly now, as no one will care to make a row about it. Don't you see the terrible tendency of the times? I call them terrible from your point of view, mother. Even the dignity of the Crown is slighted in almost every debate in the Lower House now by some fellow or other ; and to me all this seems to foreshadow the coming time when the Crown itself may fall into the dust without defenders, for there will be no Cavaliers in England to send their plate to the melting-pot and mount their serving men, and no loyal clans in the North to descend again under a Montrose or Dundee."

"And all this is to come to pass because I don't approve of old Mr. Chevenix," said Lady Julia rather scornfully, as she fanned herself ; and then, bowing to Goring, she nodded to Miss Wilmot, and both rising sailed away to the drawing-room.

Goring read a peculiar expression in the fine face of the elder lady as she withdrew, and it gave him a clue to some of Jerry's movements lately ; but he made no reference to it, nor would it have been courteous to do so, familiar as he and Jerry were.

Jerry twirled his moustaches with a momentary air of annoyance. It was evident that there existed some secret bone of contention between mother and son—a skeleton in the cupboard at

Wilmothurst; but who could have supposed that this ghastly personage was in reality the brilliant and blooming Bella Chevenix!

And when, after having a few glasses of wine together, and a cigar in the smoking-room, they rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, the obnoxious subject was again resumed by Jerry and his mother, somewhat apart from Bevil Goring, who drew a seat near the piano, over the keys of which Miss Wilmot was gracefully idling, or affecting an *andante* of Beethoven.

"The invitations for the ball in your honour, my dear boy, are all issued," said Lady Julia; "and every one has accepted—only think of that! Every one—and here is the list."

He scanned it, and saw many familiar names that stood high in the county, and said with a twirl of his moustache: "I don't see the name of Chevenix here."

"Chevenix again!" said his mother, with a cloudy eye and curling lip; "the lawyer man?"

"Who else, mother dear? Now, don't be absurd. There is no other Chevenix in all Hampshire. They must be asked—he and his daughter."

"The girl is said to look well in a drawing-room."

"She looks lovely!" exclaimed Jerry, incautiously.

"She was a mere hobbledohoy when you and she used to play at battledore and croquet together."

"She is, I repeat, a very lovely woman now, mother," continued Jerry, with enthusiasm.

"You have seen her lately?" asked the elderly lady, in a casual tone.

"Yes; often at a hop in Willis's Rooms, at the camp balls, with the buckhounds, and at Mrs. Trelawney's."

"Who *is* Mrs. Trelawney?" asked Lady Julia, languidly, while elevating her delicately pencilled eyebrows.

"A widow who lives near Aldershot, at a place called Chilcote Grange."

"Ah!"

Jerry laughed softly, as he thought how familiar his lady mother might have been with the fair widow's name had she not rejected his attention, and laughed him off cavalierly as he thought at the time.

"There is every reason in the world why we must have Miss Chevenix, mother," persisted Jerry, colouring with vexation as he returned to the charge; "she is highly accomplished, and sings well."

"Taught well, no doubt—people of that kind send their children to the best schools now."

"I should like you to hear her voice."

"Thanks—not here, at all events," said Lady Julia, shrugging her shoulders, "the girl must be forward enough—rides with the buckhounds, you say?"

"Every one does."

"The reason, perhaps, she goes there."

"I can assure you, mother, that Bel—Miss Chevenix—is a very proud girl."

"Likely enough—many vulgarians are; but, if she is so proud as you say, we must teach her what her real position is—the daughter of a village attorney—of our local agent—the granddaughter of a farmer."

"One of the oldest families on the estate."

"Enough—she will make the hundred-and-fourth person invited."

"If she accepts," said Jerry.

"*If* she accepts!" repeated his mother, with elevated brows, as she added the girl's name to her list, and tossed the golden pen from her white jewelled fingers.

"At the last meet at Salthill, she came with Miss Cheyne of Essilmont," said Jerry.

"I have heard of that girl—the daughter of a broken-down Scottish baronet. But all kinds of horrid people go, with the highest in rank, to these rough gatherings."

"Glad Goring did not hear you," said Jerry, glancing nervously towards the pair at the piano.

"Why?"

"He is rather spooney in that quarter."

"Don't use camp slang, Jerry—which quarter—the Chevenix girl?"

"No, Miss Cheyne," replied her son, in a low voice.

"Emily," said Lady Julia, "I have added that girl's name to our list—you will see that an invitation is sent to her and her father to-morrow."

"Yes, aunt," replied Emily, with a slight shade of annoyance on her naturally sweet face. "Was it not she who behaved so shockingly to Colonel Graves, of the Artillery?"

"It was Graves—the utter cad—who behaved shockingly to her, poor girl," exclaimed Jerry, with warmth.

"Really, Jerry, you must keep your temper. See how you have made Emily blush."

"Mother!"

"You are quite pugnacious in defence of this young woman; but please now let us drop the subject."

"My dear mother," said Jerry, good-humouredly, and kissing her cheek, as he had now gained his point; "the male public generally, and particularly that portion of it who wear the red rag, are rather subject to the blandishments of the fair sex, and are not all able to resist them, like St. Anthony the Abbot in his wood at Coma."

"You make a jest of everything, Jerry," said Lady Julia; "but," she added, under cover of Emily's musical performance, "it has been said that no one knows how people pick up 'a knowledge of others' antecedents from their own careless talk;' thus, my dear boy, I am glad you did not become entangled by that dreadful Trelawney woman."

Jerry, the rogue, thought so now himself, but he coloured deeply at this abrupt remark, as it showed him that his mother knew much more of his movements than he in the least suspected.

His pretty cousin, Emily, the orphan daughter of his father's younger brother, evidently had a *penchant* for him; her jealousy of any rival was easily excited; and thus she shared to the full all his mother's overstrained prejudices against Bella Chevenix, and, finding that he was still somewhat indifferent to her charms, she might doubtless have had no objection to get up a little affair with Bevil Goring. But the latter was too pre-occupied to relish her vivacity or respond to it, and, though companionable enough, she found him full of his own thoughts, and at times indifferent to a provoking degree.

When the ladies retired for the night, and Jerry joined Goring in the smoking-room to have a last whiff, with some seltzer and brandy, he found the latter deep in studying the geography of the Mediterranean, a map of which he had pulled out from a stand of maps on rollers.

"What is up, old fellow?" said Jerry; "going in for cramming again? Thought you were surely done with that beastly work."

"Thank heaven, yes; but look here!"

Goring had first seen the papers that had come by the evening post, and been cut and laid out by the butler. He had, as usual, turned to the shipping and fashionable intelligence, and to all the paragraphed news, in search of tidings of the lost one, and had alighted at last on an announcement in the *Times*

that Lord Cadbury's yacht, the *Firefly*, "with Sir Ranald Cheyne and a small but select party on board," had sailed for the Mediterranean.

Now this was not the case, as the notice had been inserted by Slagg, in obedience to the peer, as a blind to Goring in particular, while the "small and select party" consisted only of poor Alison herself.

"The Mediterranean," said Jerry, as he lit a Havanna; "that is a wide word; you can't make much of that in the hope of overhauling the yacht."

Bevil acquiesced in the fact, and that it would be almost impossible as yet to trace its route or whereabouts. He had but one comfort, though somewhat a negative one, that her father was with her; yet he knew not the real character of Lord Cadbury, nor the plans he was capable of contriving, encouraged by his own great wealth on the one hand, and the poverty and age of Sir Ranald on the other, with the girl's utter helplessness if she were, by any means, deprived of the latter's protection, now that the stings of jealousy and revenge against himself, Goring, were added to Alison's rejection of his hand, with all the brilliant settlements attached to it.

Then there would come into Bevil's heart fears that without his love to support her, and his occasional presence to sway her gentle spirit, it might be gradually bent, if not broken, under the united influence of Cadbury with his wealth and her father with his pride and poverty; and he drew many a harrowing picture of promises being perhaps wrung from her, by which she might eventually be lost to him for ever.

As it seemed now, she had been spirited away, taken out of his life suddenly—had passed, as it were, out of the scheme of his existence.

They had been parted roughly, without their hearts resting on the joy of that future which lovers alone look forward to.

Day and night he thought of her, his lost Alison. Gathering—hoarding as it were, in his inner heart, "as a miser hoards his gold—memories of passion-laden eyes seeking his, and then often long looks of fondness turned aside" lest others saw their glories, and of stolen kisses, stolen from lips that quivered and trembled for their own temerity and ardour.

He could but think again, alas for the time that has been!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me,

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. CHEVENIX'S BUSINESS.

WITH all his erratic habits and general thoughtlessness, Jerry Wilmot was not without a capacity for business ; thus on the evening after his return home he rode over to the village of Wilmothurst to visit Mr. Chevenix ostensibly as to matters connected with the estate, and with the decided desire, no doubt, of seeing the brilliant Bella.

The village consisted of a few houses, an ancient church of Norman times, with a squat square tower, covered with ivy, a spacious green, overlooked by an old thatched inn with a swinging signboard ; and opposite stood the comfortable, two-storeyed mansion of Mr. Chevenix, who acted as legal adviser in small matters, as factor, and land-agent for the Wilmots and other county families.

A kindly-mannered and benign-looking old man, he received Jerry in his cosy dining-room with considerable warmth, and the handsome Bella fairly blushed with pleasure on seeing her acknowledged admirer ; and Jerry, when he saw the rare beauty of the girl, thought how thankful he should be that the widow had *not* accepted him !

At Wilmothurst Bella enjoyed the reputation of being the best organiser of pleasant picnics in the sunny summer-time, the great designer of games and charades at Christmastide, the most tasteful decorator of the village church for festivals, a kind friend to the poor and all the little ones of the hamlet.

Yet none shone brighter or better at the balls in Brighton or elsewhere out of her narrow home circle ; she was a dashing horsewoman in the field ; but seemed always most in her element when seated over some piece of feminine work by her old father's side, as Jerry now found her, in the flower-scented and lamp-lit little dining-room surrounded by all the home influences her presence caused.

Jerry knew now precisely how Bella was viewed by his mother and cousin, and this repressed—if not his ardour—the scope of his attentions.

The haughty Bella also knew from a thousand petty instances how Lady Julia Wilmot viewed her position in society, and resented it accordingly, for she was one of the many in and about Wil-

mothurst who had felt the sting of that lady's "snub," and were against her in consequence. Thus her first thought had been to decline the invitation to the ball, which had reached her that forenoon. Then on consideration came the knowledge that to do so would cause much local speculation, that many might infer she had not been invited at all, and that by her absence she would lose the society of Jerry for a whole night; and the girl's natural desire to outshine—as she knew she would do—so many there, if not all who would be present, led her to write an acceptance.

She had done so, and at once began the serious consideration of her costume—serious only as to the variety to select from, for her father was a rich man—richer than the Lady Julia Wilmot had the least idea of.

"You are coming to our ball, of course, Miss Chevenix?" said Jerry.

"The invitation just reached me to-day, and I have not yet posted an acceptance."

"But you will come, of course," urged Jerry, looking admirably into her bright laughing eyes.

"I am not quite certain," faltered Bella, and paused.

"Oh, nonsense, she will be there readily enough," said her father; adding: "I think I may be pardoned for saying it, Mr. Wilmot, but my Bella will be the belle of the ball. However, leave us just now, dear. Mr. Wilmot has come to see me on business, I doubt not, and that won't be interesting to you."

She at once took up her work-basket, and withdrew, with a bow and a smile; and Jerry, as his gaze followed her, and he saw what a perfect creature she was, so slim and graceful, with the pure complexion that comes of health and country air, soft and sparkling brown eyes, and rich hair coiled round a shapely head, thought how unworthy it was of his mother to view the girl as she did, and to treat her as she had hitherto done.

He knew exactly from what her indecision about the ball sprang. Never before had she or her father been invited to the Manor House when other guests were there, at dinner or garden parties, and when they had dined with her and Miss Wilmot, in solitary state, she always resented bitterly the airs of patronage which Lady Julia adopted.

"She's going to the ball, never fear, Mr. Jerry, and there is her reply on the mantelpiece," said her father.

"Permit me to be the bearer of it," said Jerry, transferring it at once to his pocket.

"And now, through the medium of some brandy and water, we shall turn to business matters."

"Glad to hear you say so," replied Jerry; "I have wished much to see you, Chevenix, about money matters."

Mr. Chevenix smiled faintly, and coughed slightly behind his hand.

"How has it been that of late so little has been paid into my bank account," said Jerry, "and that I have had such difficulty in squaring matters at Aldershot; even in meeting my losses on the last Divisional Steeplechase, and in many other things; that in fact both the mater and myself are often short of the 'ready'?"

"The estate, you are aware, was heavily mortgaged by your late worthy father."

"I have heard that a hundred times, and know it to my cost," replied Jerry impatiently.

"And since you joined the army you must also be aware that, to meet the many requirements of yourself and Lady Julia, I have had to effect other mortgages, for instance, on Langley Park (which my forefathers farmed under yours for more than two centuries), on the forty acres of Upton Stoke, and on Hazelwood; that, in short, all these may never be yours again, as I see no way of your removing these encumbrances, save by a wealthy marriage; and that the good lady, your mother, has not the slightest idea of the extent of the evil and all your liabilities."

"The devil!" exclaimed Jerry, "these are pleasant things to listen to."

There was a silence between them for a time, and Jerry took a long sip at his brandy and seltzer. With all his admiration and certainly growing love for the handsome Bella, she seemed to be receding from him in the distance now.

"I am deeply sorry to tell you these things, Mr. Wilmot," said Chevenix, who had genuine respect and love for the listener, and really had the well-being of the old family at heart; "it is a serious thing for a young man like you, the inheritor of a good old name, bred with expensive tastes and so forth, to find yourself hampered and trammelled thus at your very outset of life, but so it is."

"We live and learn, Mr. Chevenix," said Jerry, with unusual bitterness for him.

"True," added his old agent.

"We live and learn, but not the *wiser* grow, says John Pomfret."

"And who the devil is he?" asked Jerry, testily.

"A poet and divine of the seventeenth century."

Jerry sat staring into the fire as if bewildered by the sudden revelation—this new state of things.

"And who holds all the infernal mortgages?" asked Jerry abruptly.

"I do—they are in the iron safe on yonder shelf."

"You! And who advanced all this money to my father, and to myself latterly?"

"I did—every shilling to the old squire and to you, Mr. Jerry; but do not be alarmed—do *not* be alarmed—I have no intention of foreclosing."

Jerry was more thunderstruck than ever. Here was another startling revelation. He found that more than half of his paternal estate was in the hands of the very man whose daughter he had been learning to love in secret, and whom his proud mother so heartily disliked and publicly slighted.

He had hinted, as related, of mortgages on the evening of his arrival with Bevil Goring, but this state of matters he was altogether unprepared for. In short, it would seem as if but a moiety of his property remained to him, and that the heiress of it all was Bella Chevenix!

Bella, the daughter of the village attorney, "the lawyer man," as Lady Julia called him, whose forefathers did yeoman service to his, and farmed old Langley Park.

"Take courage—you have yet time to look about you, and money, if it can be procured from some other source, may repair these evils," said Mr. Chevenix kindly; but he knew not what was then in Jerry's mind. That in reality a love for Bella had been fast becoming the ruling thought of his life; that on learning she had returned to Wilmothurst he had arranged to return home also, and had made up his mind, despite his mother's pride and opposition, to propose for the girl; but dared he do so now?

Their positions were completely reversed, and were he to do so she would never believe in his love or view him as other than a pretender, who offered it in barter for the mortgages her father held on his estate.

The latter was eyeing Jerry, and, having no idea what his

secret thoughts were, failed to see why, if even a half of his estate remained, he should seem so suddenly overcome, for he had grown very pale, and he respired like one in pain.

To thrust all love for Bella out of his heart was now the bitter task to which he must set himself, and perhaps to replace her image by one of the many heiresses to whom his mother so often drew his attention; but that could not be. Jolly, good-hearted Jerry would never condescend to be mercenary; he felt that he would rather a thousand times share poverty with a loving little girl like Bella, than wealth with another. Matters had not yet come to poverty—far from it; but *now*, and after all that had transpired, and he had learned *who* the holder of these fatal mortgages was, how could he speak to her or her father of love or marriage without being most cruelly and degradingly misunderstood, and having his object utterly misconstrued?

“And the interest on the mortgages?” he asked, in a hard, dry tone.

“Has been unpaid for several years.”

“Making matters worse and worse. It was six per cent. on Langley Park, Mr. Chevenix, and that is stiff interest as things go.”

“Yes, it *was*.”

“You speak of it in the past tense.”

“Yes.”

“Worse and worse,” assented Mr. Chevenix, shaking his white head. “But bear up, my dear boy. I may call you so?” added the old man, kindly patting Jerry’s shoulder. “Money will pull you through. A handsome young fellow like you, with your family prestige, will easily find a rich wife, and an officer has a hundred chances of success when other fellows have none.”

Jerry had not the heart to ask what the total sum of his liabilities amounted to, and rose to depart.

“Bid Miss Chevenix good-bye for me,” said he, as he departed in haste, having just then no desire to add to the intense mortification that crushed him by looking again on the bright face of the unconscious Bella—for unconscious she *was* of what their mutual monetary relations were till her father some time after informed her, when the news came to her perhaps too late.

Sunk in thoughts too bitter for words, Jerry rode slowly home through the dusk of the gloomy winter evening. The

barriers raised by civil fortune, and added to by a sense of honour and propriety, enhanced in his eyes the value of the girl he felt that he had lost, and rendered dearer to him the hopes he had been cherishing of late, and which had become so precious to him.

He longed for the society and advice of Goring over a "quiet weed," to talk about these things ere he confided the state of matters to his mother, who, with all her great love of him, he feared could not be brought to see how matters stood with regard to the estate and the encumbrances thereon.

When he joined her in the drawing-room before dinner, the careworn expression of his face—an expression all unusual to him—certainly struck her, but for a time only.

"You have been with Mr. Chevenix?" she asked.

"Yes, mother."

"And he has worried you with business."

"Yes; his daughter is coming to the ball. Here is her reply; I brought it with me," said he, with an irrepressible sigh.

"Of course she will come; who ever doubted it?" responded Lady Julia, as she somewhat contemptuously tossed Bella's unopened note into the fire; and Jerry turned away to join Goring and his cousin Emily, who were looking over a portfolio of prints upon a stand of gilded wood.

To Jerry at this precise time the familiar yet gorgeous drawing-room, with all its inlaid cabinets and brackets, bearing treasures of art and *bric-à-brac*, as seen under the soft light of wax candles in sconces and the glittering crystal chandelier, gave a sense of worry by its apparent incongruity, as did the very attire of his mother and cousin by the richness of its materials, the laces, the jewelry; and he absolutely shivered when he thought of the coming birthday ball, with its hundred-and-four guests on one hand, and the mortgages of Chevenix with their unpaid interest on the other.

To Jerry it seemed that ere long his mother might have to betake herself to Bruges or Boulogne to retrench, while he might have to exchange for India if the route came not speedily for Africa.

Bevil Goring, when they were alone, heard with genuine concern the state of affairs as Jerry set them before him, and agreed with him that to continue his attentions to Miss Chevenix would lead to an entire misconstruction on the part of herself and her father as to the true state of his heart, and lead them

to infer that he was only a fortune-hunter ; and honest Jerry blushed scarlet at the name, and twirled and gnawed his moustache with intense irritation.

Though she failed to take in the whole situation—which Jerry knew would be the case—Lady Julia heard his tidings with considerable alarm, and felt her wrath increased against Mr. Chevenix, which was utterly unreasonable.

“The state of our—or rather your—affairs, as this man has set them before you, Jerry,” said Lady Julia, “now renders it absolutely necessary that you should marry for money, and that at once.”

“Or cut the service and emigrate,” groaned Jerry.

“Emigrate !”

“Invest in a pickaxe and spade, and try Ballarat or the Diamond Fields.”

“How can you jest thus ?” said his mother, loftily.

“To me the nearest heiress seems to be Bella Chevenix,” said Jerry, not unwilling to revenge her for the slighting remarks his mother daily made.

“She has a fortune certainly—a fortune won by advances made upon our lands—but of what use can it be to her, brought up, as she has been, ignorant of the habits, the tastes, and requirements of our class ?”

“She is ignorant of none, and enjoys them all,” replied Jerry, with some asperity.

“You inherited the estate encumbered, and have, in no small degree added to its burdens, and, if you do not make a rich marriage, may be—my poor, dear Jerry—a ruined man.”

“We are going to fight King Koffee, they say. I’ll get taken prisoner, and marry his youngest daughter !” cried Jerry, with a gleam of his old recklessness.

For some days now he did not go near Bella Chevenix, who began to feel a little wroth at him in consequence, as she had no key as yet to what influenced Jerry.

“Their ball !” exclaimed the proud girl, petulantly ; “I am not sure that I should go, papa, to be patronised and slighted perhaps.”

“Patronised or slighted—who dare do either to you ?” asked her father, with surprise.

“I shall be bored to death, I fear.”

But the desire to appear where she knew she would shine

prevailed over all her doubts, and she devoted all her energies to have a costume that should be second to none.

Meanwhile Jerry found the impossibility of abstaining from visiting the house of Mr. Chevenix, and so days of meetings in various ways passed—meetings in which their lives seemed to be mutually emerged in that sweet occupation which was not quite love-making, but yet was far, far in advance of that perilous frivolity that so often leads to it called—flirtation.

Yet Jerry was further now from disclosing himself than ever, and Bella seemed in no hurry for him to do so, for she was young enough—even after all she had seen of society—to shrink from a declaration, for to a girl there is something so seductive, so sweet in hovering on the brink, when she, as Bella did in her secret heart, loves the man.

Cousin Emily was not slow in discovering the direction in which Jerry so often turned his horse's head, and hinted thereof to Lady Julia.

“But for the dangers my poor boy will have to encounter,” said the latter, “I would hail with pleasure his departure to the coast of Africa, as a useful means of separating him from this most artful creature.”

Meanwhile an influx of visitors and guests preluded the ball, as many came from a considerable distance. Like Goring, Jerry was in no mood for all this gaiety just then, and the latter resented that his duties as host enforced his presence at Wilmothurst, and consequent absence from Bella Chevenix.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIREFLY.

THE red sun of a clear winter day was shining on the two chalky eminences at the embouchure of the Arques, or Bethune, and on the low tongue of land between them, whereon is situated the sea-port of Dieppe in Normandy, from the church of which the coast of England can be distinctly seen, when the *Firefly*, which really was a beautiful yacht, crept slowly along on a wind under the lee of the shore, from which she was rather more than a mile distant.

She was a taut-rigged craft of about two hundred tons, and whether one regarded the crew the fitting of the rigging, or

the cut of the sails, it was evident that in skilful hands she could do anything. For a Cowes yacht she was curiously rigged, being a hermaphrodite—brig forward and schooner aft. Her foremast, like her bowsprit, was strong and heavy, her mainmast long and tapering. Her upper spars were slender and light, with topmast, topgallant mast, and royal mast, all like slender wands, yet capable of carrying a great amount of canvas. Her flush deck was white as the driven snow, and she had eight six-pounders, all brass, and polished like gold—bright as the copper with which she was sheathed to the bends.

Such was the craft on board of which Alison Cheyne found herself a species of prisoner, and compelled to take a part in an erratic and apparently a purposeless cruise.

To sail for Madeira had been the first intention of Lord Cadbury, when Slagg, by his direction, inserted in the newspapers a paragraph to the effect that he had gone to the Mediterranean—a paragraph expressly designed to mislead Bevil Goring; but heavy head-winds had prevailed, and after hanging about in “the Chops of the Channel” for a week and more, the *Firefly* was standing northward along the coast of France.

Tom Llanyard, Cadbury’s captain, a bluff-looking, curly-haired man about forty years of age, had been for a brief space a warrant officer in the Royal Navy. He was a good-hearted fellow—not very polished, but a thorough seaman. He had a secret contempt for the character of his employer, who did not care much for yachting, but thought it sounded well to have such an appendage as the *Firefly* at Cowes. Tom found the pay good; the lodging ditto; and the duty was easy. Tom was a sailor or nothing; and thus being compelled to work, “the yacht service,” as he used to say, “suited him to a hair.”

He certainly thought the season a strange one for a cruise; and as for Mr. Gaskins, Cadbury’s groom and chief valet, he utterly loathed the whole expedition, and, connecting it shrewdly in some way with Miss Cheyne, he hated her with a most unholy hatred.

To Tom Llanyard she was a new experience; she was so totally unlike any other of her sex he had seen on board the *Firefly*; and he had—we are sorry to say—seen many that were rather remarkable.

The weather had been rough, and the poor girl, who had suffered much from sea-sickness, of a necessity remained

below ; while her luckless attendant, Daisy Prune, was utterly prostrated by the same ailment, and the order of things was now reversed, for Alison had to attend upon her. The presence of Daisy, however, was a source of protection to the former, as it saved her from much of the attention of Cadbury, who had hoped that great events might be developed or achieved by the sea voyage.

Alison's freshness was delightful to the coarse, jaded man of the world, who, tired at last of extravagant and congenial dissipation (that would have horrified his worthy father the Alderman of Threadneedle Street), thought now of trying domestic felicity, *pour se désennuyer* ; and truly Alison was so unlike most of the other women he had known, or whose acquaintance he had chosen to cultivate, that the present opportunity gave him great expectations of the future.

He actually reckoned upon a safe conquest, now that he had her all to himself ; and so far as Sir Ranald was concerned, while piling kindnesses upon him, and pressing upon him also the best wines that the cellar of Cadbury Court offered, he would not have been sorry had a gale of wind blown the pompous old baronet overboard, and left Alison alone in the world—alone and at his mercy !

Leaving Sir Ranald busy with a telescope on deck scanning the churches of St. Jacques and St. Remy, with Le Follet and the fisher town of Dieppe, Cadbury descended to the luxurious and beautiful little cabin of the yacht, the gilded and mahogany fittings of which were exquisite, and there found Alison—alone, as he expected.

How sad and fair, young and pure, she looked in all the brightness of her beauty, as her head rested against the crimson back of the cushioned locker or sofa on which she was seated in an attitude expressive of utter weariness of heart.

"Alison," said he, attempting to take her hand.

Her eyes flashed now, and her proud little lip curled, as she said : "Lord Cadbury, when did I give you permission to call me—as papa does—by my Christian name ?"

"Why do you *Lord* me ?" he asked ; "I would you called me—Timothy," he added, rather faintly ; and at this absurd name a little smile flickered on Alison's pale face, and a gesture of impatience escaped her, as she knew that she was about to be subjected to some more of his odious and weary love-making.

"My passion for you made me so modest and diffident,"

said he (though in reality it was his years), "that I addressed myself first to your father, though you were well aware of the sweet hopes I fostered in my heart, Alison."

"It is impossible for me to listen to more of this sort of thing, Lord Cadbury."

"I can scarcely believe that your decision is final—that you are in earnest with me."

"Earnest! Do you imagine, sir, that I would jest in this matter, and—with you?" she exclaimed, becoming—with all her native gentleness—tremulous with suppressed passion.

"When once I ventured to hint of a deeper interest in you than mere friendship, you did not discourage me," urged Cadbury, who by use and wont could make love in his own way pretty fluently now.

"Perhaps I misunderstood you,—or deemed it—deemed it——"

"What, Alison?"

"A fatherly interest."

Cadbury winced a little at this remark.

"In anything beyond that," continued Alison, "you perhaps do me honour, but in any instance I can never love where I do not respect and esteem."

"And have I forfeited your esteem?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"By trepanning me on board this yacht—away from home and my friends!"

"Friends at Aldershot," thought Cadbury, as he laughed to himself and said: "But why so severe a term as trepanning?"

"You led me to believe when we quitted Chilcote in such hot haste that instant flight alone in this vessel would save papa from arrest through certain bills which he says he saw you destroy. So you and he—*he*," she added, with a heavy sob—"have both deceived me, and now I believe neither of you. It was a vile trick on the part of you both to separate me from Captain Goring."

Cadbury had reckoned at least upon her gratitude for taking up the bills of Slagg, as he had to some extent won that of her father; but even this plan failed to serve him, and so far as Alison was concerned he might as well have thrown his money into the sea. The name of his rival on her lips infuriated him, and he tugged at his long, white horse-shoe moustache viciously,

as he thought that he had played what he deemed his trump card, and yet lost after all !

He gave her a glance of a rather mingled nature and re-treated to the deck, where his discomposure of face and manner was so apparent to Sir Ranald that, after a few words of explanation, the latter sought the cabin to remonstrate with the unfortunate and weary Alison.

As was before hinted, Sir Ranald's emotions were of a curiously mingled nature. He felt that he certainly owed a debt of gratitude to Lord Cadbury for relieving him of terrible monetary pressure, and he was anxious, for various reasons, that Alison should accept him. He had no romance in his nature—never had any, and did not believe that disparity of years and tastes—still less a secret or previous fancy—were to be valued or consulted at all !

He felt that he acted wisely to his daughter in leaguings with the wealthy peer against her ; yet, over and above all, he loved her dearly and tenderly ; and amid all this was an undying hostility to Bevil Goring, whom he deemed the real cause of all this opposition to their wishes, and consequently the present trouble, turmoil, and unnecessary voyaging in rough and wintry weather.

Though it was a relief without doubt, to be away now beyond the reach or ken of the hook-nosed or vulture-eyed money-lenders, who, like Slagg, had long possessed, among their oft-times hopelessly-regarded assets, his bills and acceptances.

He saw she looked pale, very pale indeed ; but that, of course, he attributed to the *mal de mer* ; but as for love, no one, he believed, ever sickened or died of that. A long separation was the surest and best cure.

"Foolish girl !" he began at once ; "still mooning, and actually talking, as Cadbury told me, of that utterly ineligible and most detrimental fellow at Aldershot ; I am certain you could forget him if you tried, Alison. In these days of ours, ninety-nine girls out of a hundred would leap with exultation at such offers as those of Lord Cadbury."

"Then, I suppose, I must be the hundredth girl, papa," said Alison, steadily and gravely ; for a consciousness that her father, whom she had deemed the mirror of honour, had leagued with this *parvenu* to deceive her, had caused a change in her manner towards him.

"And I repeat that in these days of ours," he continued, "it is, or ought to be, the object of both men and women to marry well."

"That is, to marry for money," said Alison.

"Yes; if a girl has beauty and birth, but not money, she should look for some one who has that more than necessary element towards our very existence. If she has money with both these attributes, she should look for something more."

"More, papa?"

"Yes, she should look for that which a poor girl seldom or never has offered her."

"And what is that?"

"A title."

"In fact, in any way or every way to sell herself to the highest bidder. Oh, what a selfish code!" exclaimed the girl, with great bitterness of heart. "Did the Cheynes of Essilmont always do this?"

"They of old were not as we are now."

"What?"

"Beggars!" replied her father with equal bitterness of heart, for his was naturally a proud one; "but, as Lever says, 'the world makes us many things we never meant to be.'"

"Do you forget, papa, that marriage is a sacrament, and that without a full and perfect consent it is in reality no marriage at all, and should not be binding, even though the blessing were given by the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"What do you mean, Alison?" asked her father, surprised alike by her tone and this theory.

"Simply what I say."

"How dare you, a mere girl, talk thus?"

"Take care, papa. If driven desperate, there is no knowing what I may—not say—but do!"

Sir Ranald became silent. He had never seen her in this mood before; and he, of course, ascribed it to "the fatal influence that fellow Goring had obtained over her mind."

So this conversation ended; but the interview with her father and that with Cadbury are but examples of many with which she was tormented daily *ad nauseam*.

Alison ere long had fresh food for sorrow given to her, when a pilot boat brought off to the *Firefly* some London papers, and in these she was informed—as if by chance—there were rumours of the fast approaching war in Africa, and she saw the glances, most meaning glances, of satisfaction that were exchanged by her father and Lord Cadbury, on its being

announced that among the troops detailed for service in the field under Sir Garnet Wolseley was the regiment of Bevil Goring; and so a double and more terrible separation—perhaps a final and fatal one—was before them, and the heart of the poor girl seemed to fill with tears as she read and re-read the startling paragraph.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOM LLANYARD.

“Is it love itself,” asks a writer, “or the lover that a young girl thinks most of, when she becomes conscious of this dual existence in her heart? I am inclined to think it is the former. The novelty of her own sensations occupies her more than the person to whom she owes their birth and existence.”

It may be thus with some, but it was *not* so with Alison Cheyne, for she thought of Bevil—Bevil Goring only—as the embodiment of her love and of all she could love.

All idea of going to Madeira had been abandoned, and Cadbury suggested that, after cruising a little in the Channel, they should land in France and visit Paris, Brussels, or some other place, when the change of scene might cause some favourable change in Alison's mind; and when—he was not without the secret and evil hope of contriving to lose or drop Sir Ranald by the way!

Thus, next morning saw the *Firefly* still hugging the coast of France, and in sight of the Hôtel de Ville of Boulogne, and the hill to the westward thereof, surmounted by the stately column of Napoleon.

Attended by pretty Daisy Prune, who could not make out the situation in any way, so far as her mistress was concerned (and who was the object of much nautical admiration among the yachtsmen forward), Alison came on deck attired in her warm sealskin jacket, with her little hands deep in her muff, and a thick veil tied tightly over her face, and Tom Llanyard hastened aft to give her his hand to a comfortable seat, to place a hassock under her feet, and wrap a couple of railway rugs around her—all of which he did deftly and ere Lord Cadbury could reach her.

Cadbury and her father were below in the cabin writing letters to be posted on shore; thus, for a time, Alison was left to her own reflections.

Now Tom Llanyard was not unused, we have said, to having ladies on board the *Firfly*; but he knew not what to make of Alison, she was every way, in tone and aspect, so unlike the much be-rouged fair ones with golden locks with whom Cadbury had more than once sought seclusion on the world of waters, or amid the pretty seaports of the Mediterranean.

The rich hue of her abundant hair, the pensive sadness of her sweet face, and the extreme gentleness of her voice, all attracted the honest seaman greatly towards her; and she had little hands and feet that a sculptor might rave about. Her gray-blue, soft, and velvety eyes were gazing dreamily and listlessly at the outlines of the French cliffs with that unseeing expression peculiar to those whose minds are preoccupied.

"What can she be thinking about?" surmised Tom, as he drew near, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his short blue pea-jacket. "A primrose on the river's brink will be a good deal to her, no doubt; as a writer has it, 'she would romance about it, and poetise about it, and weave all sorts of fantastic stories about it to herself, and it would be a very wonderful primrose indeed before she had done with it.'"

So thought Tom while watching her, but Alison had one idea in her mind—Bevil Goring, and how he would be construing her sudden disappearance.

The monotonous wash of the waves through which the yacht was running, the hum of the wind through the rigging overhead, and the measured pattering of the reef points on the canvas as the vessel rolled a little, lulled her. That strange sense of a double existence which comes over us at times—especially in those of excitement or sorrow—was with her now, and she seemed to hear the voice of Bevil and be with him again under the shadow of the great beech-trees, where perhaps at that moment he was watching and waiting for her in wonder at her non-appearance, and where so often amid all their love talk he had paid her what a novelist calls "the best compliment man can pay woman—that of addressing her as a rational being."

If they never met again, how should she be able to live through all the years of her life without him? Might it not be that in separation Bevil might cease to love her—might only remember her father's insulting conduct to him at Chilcote, and in time learn to love some one else, so that if again they met it could only be as strangers?

Strangers! Then, at the ideas her busy mind conjured up,

tears began to ooze slowly from her eyes under the concealment of her veil.

She thought often of the hound she had seen, or imagined she had seen, on that eventful night ; the memory of it haunted her painfully ; and doubtless she would now have dismissed it from her mind as an optical delusion, but for its appearance being so strangely corroborated by Archie stating that the baying of one in the garden had awakened her father.

In her heart at times fear and pity for the latter struggled with passionate resentment at Lord Cadbury as a schemer who had separated her from her lover. Her father's worldliness was, perhaps, far more a matter of habit and education than nature. He was, however, now like most men of rank—Scottish men of rank, more than any in Europe—selfish to the heart's core ; sorry we are to write it, but the history of the past has too often proved this to be the case.

"That is the old castle of Boulogne, Miss Cheyne," said Tom Llanyard, drawing near her, and finding it impossible not to say something ; "and now we can make out the arched gateways in the ramparts."

"I have been there," replied Alison, "and know the place well—the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice, and all the pretty promenades."

Indeed, she knew the place rather too well, as her father had been compelled to retire there more than once, from motives of prudence and economy.

"Where are we sailing to ?" she asked, after a pause.

"I scarcely know, Miss Cheyne ; Lord Cadbury's orders are that we are to hug the coast of France and keep under easy sail. I thought, perhaps, you might know," he added.

"No, I know nothing," she answered, wearily.

"Surely it can't be that this mere girl is about to chuck herself away on a brute like Cadbury !" thought Tom, as he looked with sympathy on her blanched face and quivering lip.

"Thank you—you are very kind to me," said Alison, as he readjusted the rugs and wraps about her.

"Kind to you !" ejaculated Tom, "who on earth or sea either would not be kind to you !"

Alison smiled at his blunt energy, and she rather clung to the society of this good, cheery, honest fellow, and felt, when with or near him, a sense of protection.

"It is evident that Cadbury is up to some game," thought

Tom; "but it is the way of the world—the world in which these people live. Her youth and beauty, poor girl, will be his; his rank and money, the old bloater, will be hers—so the olds are evens, and they are quits."

In the vexation this reflection gave him Tom took off his naval cap and passed a hand over his forehead. As he did so, Alison for the first time remarked that a deep red scar traversed it from the right temple to the left eyebrow.

"You must at some time have met with a terrible accident, Captain Llanyard," said she, sympathetically; "what a pity that wound is in your forehead!"

"I thank you, Miss Cheyne, for the interest it gives me in your eyes. I was in the Queen's service when I got that wound, and nearly lost the number of my mess thereby. Shall I tell you about it?"

"If you please."

"Eight years ago I was serving with the China squadron, and, having been left sick at Canton, took a passage in the steamer *Kent* to join my ship, which was lying off Macao. She had a great many male passengers on board—all narrow-eyed, greedy, and ferocious-looking Chinese. They were about thirty in number, and we had barely cleared the Tigris and made a good offing when I discovered, by my knowledge of the lingo, that every one of them was a pirate, and that the whole gang had taken their passage together with the intention of seizing the ship and cargo, after killing every other soul on board.

"Strange to say, as if they had some mysterious prevision of what was about to ensue, a shoal of sharks followed us from the mouth of the Tigris.

"I had barely informed the captain of what I had discovered when we heard a row forward in the fore-castle, where they got up a sham disturbance, and all suddenly appeared with arms—swords, pistols, and knives, which they had secreted under their clothes. The mate went forward to quell the noise, but was instantly cut down.

"No one on board had any weapons but myself and the captain. We had both revolvers, and I had my sword; but what could we do among so many? The crew betook themselves to handspikes and boathooks, and a close conflict ensued, in which the captain and many shared the fate of the mate; the scene became horrible, and the deck was covered with blood.

"Fighting only to protect life, and not with the hope of escaping death, I made a terrible resistance. The six chambers of my revolver disposed of six of the gang ; with my sword I cut down two more, when it broke off at the hilt. I was helpless then, got this cut across my head, and was forced to leap overboard, where, all but blinded by my own blood, I clung to the fore-chains, oblivious of the sharks that were gliding stealthily about, while the yells, shouts, and explosion of fire-arms continued on deck until all the crew were disposed of, save a few who contrived to secrete themselves below.

"Then the ship was ransacked from stem to stern ; twelve thousand dollars in notes of the Hong Kong banks were taken from repositories of the purser ; a hundred cases of rich silk and all the most valuable things that could be found were brought on deck ; the boats were hoisted out, and in them, laden with plunder, the pirates departed for the shore, leaving the *Kent* floating like a log on the water, with the blood trickling from her scuppers into the moonlighted sea.

"I managed to scramble on board, and never shall I forget the sight her decks presented, for the bodies of the dead were hacked and mutilated beyond all recognition. I bound up my wound, when almost fainting with exhaustion and loss of blood. A gunboat bound for Macao overhauled us next day, and with her I rejoined my ship ; but the damage done to my figure-head will never pass away, and times there are when it causes me to feel giddy and strange even still."

Finding that he had procured a listener, though a rather appalled one, Tom told her many other anecdotes of the sea ; but they were all of a gloomy and depressing kind, and had reference to wrecks and rafts of starving castaways, of pest-stricken ships found with all their crews dead but one man, of cannibals and sharks, and much more to the same purpose, for no other element is so full of mystery to the imaginative mind as the world of waters ; and so thought Alison, as the *Firefly* floated in her aimless voyage upon it, and she surveyed around her the vastness of the sea, with that strange fascination it possesses—"glorious with light or dreadful with darkness, instinct with silent shadow always gliding over its everlasting motion, it appeals to the senses as a kind of materialised eternity, a wondrous world, barren and lonely, whereon not the giddiest flow of wind that ever crisped its ripples can match the capriciousness of its fathomless and mighty heart."

Of that capriciousness, and the perils incident to those who traverse its trackless bosom, poor Alison was fated to have a terrible experience ere the dawn of the next day shone upon its rolling waves.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISASTROUS NIGHT.

ALL day the *Firefly* had run pretty swiftly along the coast of France, and that of Belgium, low, flat and sandy, was on her lee, when a pitchy darkness fell upon the sea. The sky overhead was black and starless, and most cheerless indeed seemed the gloom amid which the yacht was sailing.

Muffled in her warmest wraps, Alison was lingering on deck, alone, though the night was rather advanced, and she leant on, or rather clung to, Tom Llanyard's arm as she promenaded the now damp and somewhat slippery deck, walking restlessly to and fro, like a caged animal, sometimes muttering to herself: "Oh, if I could but tire myself out—utterly out—that I might get some deep and dreamless sleep at night!"

The deck at that time was far from comfortable, but she preferred it to the cabin, with the society of Cadbury, who believed in what Hawley Smart calls, "tobacco and *moistened* conversation," and was having a cigarette and brandy and water with Sir Ranald.

To the eastward some faint lights twinkled for a time far off and dim in the distance, with black wave-tops rising opaquely between, indicating the whereabouts of some Flemish village; but even these melted out, and the darkness seemed to become deeper still.

To Alison's eye it was a positive relief to watch from time to time the light of the binnacle-lamp as it streamed on the weather-beaten visage of the man at the wheel, his figure swaying steadily with the motion of the yacht, and his feet planted firmly on a wooden grating; to watch the other light in the skylight of the warm and cosy cabin, and the occasional showers of red sparks that came from the funnel of its fire-place, and melted out amid the gloom, to leeward.

"And England lies there?" said Alison, turning her face westward.

"Yes, Miss Cheyne," replied Tom, who was greatly enchanted to have the girl all to himself, and to feel her little hand clinging to his arm. "I should think that Harwich is well-nigh abeam of us now."

"And how far off may it be?"

"Some sixty miles or so. Too far," he added, laughing, "for us to hear the clang of the Bell Buoy."

"Too far, indeed!"

"Are you anxious to return homeward?"

"Oh yes, I hope, I do hope we shall do so soon," exclaimed Alison, with a little sob in her throat.

Tom Llanyard heard the sound, and, kindly patting the hand that lay on his arm, he said, laughingly: "There is nothing in this world like hope, to a sailor especially. What does the old song say?"

And Tom sang in a low, and not unmusical voice:

Poor Jack saw his bark on the ocean of life
Now sink, now the billows o'ertop,
When despair would present him a bullet or knife,
He lays hold on the anchor of Hope.

His chest and his trifles may sink in the wave,
Fore and aft a loved messmate may drop,
He may shed a salt tear for the loss of the brave,
But he leans on the anchor of Hope.

"Heart of oak," sobs he bluntly, "your fate I deplore,
Ne'er a smarter could splice me a rope,
Still, my lad, we must keep a good look-out afore,
And depend on the anchor of Hope."

Ere Alison could say a word of compliment to Tom on his singing, one of the watch forward cried out: "Light ahead!"

"Where away?" asked Tom.

"Right ahead, sir."

"I can't see it."

"Can't help that, sir; it was there a moment ago, a point or so on the lee bow."

Another man of the watch asserted the same thing. Tom Llanyard got his night-glass and swept the obscurity ahead with it, but in vain.

Intensely dark was the night—intensely black the sea through which the yacht was running. The gurgle and wash of the billows could be heard at the bows and under the counter, but nothing was seen of them. There was no phos-

phorescent gleam—no pale streak of foam to catch the eye or define the presence of the deep, and the imaginative mind of Alison felt in its fullest sense all the mystery of the hidden miles of water that were around her; while the keen and ceaseless watch kept by those on deck impressed her with a curiously mingled sense of security and danger—security in the skill and courage of the crew; danger in the knowledge that there were shoals and sands about her, and a sea alive with vessels.

Suddenly out of the darkness there came two wavering flames, then a row of red round lights, all in a line, as a steamer swept past, looming huge and dark, with a cloud of red sparks streaming to leeward from her unseen funnel, and the commotion her screw propeller and the pulsing her engines made in the water passed away with her, and there seemed to be a deeper darkness all around the *Firefly* as she faded into the obscurity astern.

“That was the light you saw?” said Tom to the look-out man forward.

“It was *not*, sir,” replied the sailor confidently, “for there it is again!”

At some undefinable distance a light, like that of a lantern, flickering, feeble, and lambent, seemed to dance for a moment on the waves, and then disappeared.

Suddenly a shout went from stem to stern.

“Something right ahead—something large and black, Captain Llanyard!” cried the look-out man.

“Hard a-port—the helm—hard a-port,” thundered Llanyard, “or we’ll be slap into her!”

Lord Cadbury and Sir Ranald now came rushing on deck, and quitting the arm of Tom, who had now other work to do, Alison clung fearfully to her father, whose arm went instinctively round her.

“Lights—lights alongside—where is she?—what is it, in the name of God?” cried twenty voices, as a dreadful crash, followed by the sound of splintering wood, was heard.

“All hands shorten sail!” cried Tom Llanyard; “man the fore clew garnets—stand by the top-gallant clew-lines—stand by the peak and throat halyards—down with the jib—lift tacks and sheets—let go and belay—look to the main gaff, and get out lights, for God’s sake!”

Tom’s rapid orders were skilfully and speedily obeyed, and in a very few minutes the sails were reduced and nearly furled,

while the cold night wind swept through the open rigging, and the *Firefly* rose and fell on the long rollers, with a terrible jarring and rasping sound, as she was evidently foul of some vessel, but had not suffered apparently, according to the carpenter's first report on the state of the pumps.

She lay-to with only canvas enough on her for steering purposes.

A great flame now glared upward right under her bows, as the wavering and streaming blaze from a flare-tin showed that she was foul of a great Belgian fishing smack, of a tonnage equal to her own—her deck to all appearance full of men, shrieking and gesticulating as only Frenchmen or Belgians gesticulate and shriek, inspired by terror, their pallid and excited faces, half seen in light, half hidden in shadow, against the surrounding blackness, as the red glare from the upheld flare-tin fell on them, and on the head or berthing boards of the lugger, which bore her name—*Le Chien Noir d'Ostende*—The Black Hound of Ostend! The Black Hound! Was there a fatality in this?

Alison was sick with affright; her father looked grimly, sternly, and pitifully on; but my Lord Cadbury's teeth (or what remained of them) were clattering in his jaws like castanets.

"This is no fault of ours, my lord," said Tom, "we had our top-light, as you see; these lubbers had none."

As he spoke the red light from the flare-tin shed one more than usually powerful glare of radiance on the crowd of appalled visages that lined the hull and filled the rigging of the broken and battered lugger, and then expired, leaving all in the blackness of night again.

Every lantern in the *Firefly* was now brought on deck and bent on to ropes, the boats were cleared away for hoisting out, fenders were hung over the side, and life-buoys and belts cut away. Again came the crashing, rasping sound, as the hull of the lugger, which was evidently stove in, swerved alongside the yacht, across the deck of which her mainmast fell with a crash, bringing down the fore-topmast of the former with all its top hamper, making her for the time also a helpless wreck.

A block swinging at the end of a rope struck Sir Ranald Cheyne and hurled him on the deck. Alison bent over him in despair and terror indescribable and unutterable, feeling scarcely able to restrain the conviction that all this was really happening to herself.

"We are bulged forward, and water is rising fast below now, my lord," reported the carpenter, rushing up to Cadbury, who seemed paralysed with terror.

"Stand by the fall-tackles, and lower away the boats," ordered Tom Llanyard, whose voice could scarcely be heard amid the hubbub on board the lugger, which was still alongside.

Fully five minutes elapsed before this was done; one fall-tackle got jammed in the davit-block, another boat was without its plug, and, barely had the two boats of the *Firefly* touched the water, when, knife in hand, the terrified crew of the lugger began to crowd into them.

By this time poor Alison had fainted, with little Daisy Prune crawling close to her side, and was in blessed unconsciousness of the awful scene around her presented by so many men struggling for life, and drowning, as both vessels began apparently to settle gradually down into the black and silent midnight sea.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BALL.

MUCH about the time of the disaster we have recorded, some other of our *dramatis personæ* were actors amid a very different scene.

A star-lighted but moonless sky overhung the stately modern mansion of Wilmothurst, and gloomy indeed would the long, wintry avenue have looked, but for the many-coloured lamps that shed a soft radiance from branch to branch, and from one gnarled stem to another, lighting the gravelled way for the fast-rolling carriages that came in quick succession to the Tuscan *porte-cochère*, setting down the shawled and daintily-shod guests, where a scarlet carpeting extended from the doorway to the terrace.

The great house was all ablaze with lights that glowed from every lofty window, and made the owls wink and blink in the tower of the village church; while a huge fire in the arched fireplace of the entrance-hall sent forth a ruddy glow every time the tall double doors were unfolded to admit a guest.

Bella Chevenix came fully arrayed for conquest. Her dress of sheeny white silk was cut so as to display fully her

beautiful throat and shoulders, with short sleeves that left her snowy arms bare. She wore very little jewellery ; but among the folds of her skirt were trails of natural flowers, with their fresh green leaves. There was a rich flush on her cheeks, a radiance in her soft hazel eyes, and undoubtedly the girl looked surpassingly bright and beautiful ; and among the guests she was glad to see Bevil Goring, Dalton—looking *distrain*, as he always did now—and other Aldershot men whom she knew, and had met at balls, meets, and garden-parties.

As one handsome girl after another came in, all more or less beautifully attired, bright with smiles and glittering with jewels, Goring looked on the groups that gathered wistfully as one in a dream, thinking where at that precise time was *she* who might have outshone them all—in his eyes at least.

The great dancing-room was some ninety feet long, and its walls were hung with many old family portraits, between which were vacant spaces once occupied by the Rubens, Titians, Vandycks, and other really valuable pictures, all of which had been sold in the lifetime of Jerry's father—perhaps before the fatal mortgages had been contracted.

In a corridor beyond was the band of the Wilmothurst Rifle Volunteers to furnish music for the dancers, who speedily began to arrange themselves, while the programme cards were fast filling up.

Under the watchful eyes of his mother and his cousin Emily, Jerry inscribed his name more than once upon that of Bella Chevenix, but took care that it should be for dances further on in the night.

Jerry opened the ball with the Countess of Ashcombe, the "head lady" of the evening, after which he went near her no more, or—as his mother phrased it—"neglected her shamefully for that Chevenix girl," whose father stood apart in a corner watching with fondness and admiration the beauty of Bella, the grace with which she floated through a succession of waltzes, and seemed to be enjoying herself to the full, especially when she had her first dance with Jerry, who eventually brought her panting and breathless to the side of her father, just as the latter was addressing Lady Julia, who chanced to be near him.

"The young fellows of *our* time, my lady," said he, in a fidgety way, feeling the necessity for saying something, "were better at this sort of work than those of the present ; they don't seem equal to dancing, somehow."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Chevenix," said Lady Julia, with one of her calm stares.

"I mean that we fogies saw something *like* dancing at country balls in *our* time; what 'Sir Rogers' we danced, cross hands and down the middle, and all that sort of thing, before, as now, we became anxious about draughts and damp linen, and all that sort of thing, my lady."

Lady Julia smiled disdainfully, and found herself looking as if she failed to comprehend him.

"Yes," said Jerry, uncomfortably, "Hampshire people did cling to these fashions, Mr. Chevenix, and, when they danced, meant it and no mistake."

Though, in his preoccupation of mind, Bevil Goring was far from enjoying himself, he was too good a dancer not to have plenty of partners, but there was more than one pair of lovers there that night who sought the corridors, the staircase, or the aisles of the great conservatory, and he regarded them enviously, as he thought of her from whom he was as yet so hopelessly, and, as it seemed, cruelly and absurdly separated.

But, as for the ball, it is chiefly as regards Jerry's affair that we refer to it. As a ball it was undoubtedly a success. There was a sprinkling of titled people, a number of the squirearchy, a large proportion of gentlemen farmers, and blooming dowagers blessed with broods of pert, pretty, marriageable daughters, and Jerry had brought a considerable male contingent from the camp, so "all went merry as a marriage bell."

As for Bella, she was never without partners, as those who danced with her once always came *back again*.

"Jerry has actually introduced Lord Twesildown to that girl!" said Lady Julia behind her fan to Cousin Emily, who grew pale with annoyance. We may mention that the peer in question took his title from the highest mountain which overlooks Aldershot. But after a turn or two they observed that the pair took a promenade round the room.

"Is this your first visit to the district?" asked Lord Twesildown.

"Oh, no," replied Bella, "I live here."

"Live here, at Wilmothurst!"

"Yes—at the village."

"How funny!" drawled his lordship, rather puzzled. "Oh, Chevenix—I remember the name now."

"Lead me to a seat, please," said Bella curtly, on which he conducted her to one near Lady Julia, and retired into a corner.

"Tired already, Miss Chevenix?" asked Lady Julia.

"Oh, no—I never tire of the waltz when I have a good partner," replied Bella.

"And Lord Twesildown?"

"Oh, he can't dance a bit."

"Heavens!—surely you did not tell him so?"

"Well, I hinted as much."

"Oh, Miss Chevenix, what will he think?"

"He said he thought he would adapt his step to mine, but he had no step to adapt."

"But to say this to a man of his position!"

The haughty Bella, who resented Lady Julia's tone and expression of eye, only fanned herself and laughed, as if she thought an earl's son might be "snubbed" as well as that of a yeoman.

Her hostess now turned her back on Bella, and never addressed her again.

As Jerry was again drawing near, Lady Julia approached him, and said: "Do you mean to dance with no one but Miss Chevenix to-night?"

"Mother, I have only danced with her twice as yet, and I have done my duty to everyone else, so I think I may please myself now. Our waltz, I think, Miss Chevenix," he added, as his arm went round her, and they disappeared among the whirling circles that swept over the polished floor to the music of the military band.

Bella had been—nay, was still—a good deal of a flirt, perhaps in a very innocent way, but a something now in the expression of Jerry's eyes, in the tone of his voice, nay, in the very touch of his hand, startled her hitherto careless heart from its girlish unconsciousness and gave it a thrill, "too sweet for fever, too timid for joy," or developed still further the new sensations to which it had been awakening.

And Jerry, with his arm caressingly around her and her breath on his cheek, smiled at himself as he thought of his past jealousy of Dalton and Mrs. Trelawney—Dalton, the good-natured cynic!

He had still too much command over himself, and, though young, was too much a man of the world to let those around him read his thoughts with reference to Bella; but his watchful mother could detect that it was into Bella's eyes he looked with passion when near her, that it was Bella he took in to supper, and with whom he sat in the conservatory after, where

the flashing fountain played amid the softly veiled light, and half concealed his utterances by the sound of its waters.

And Jerry was proudly conscious that Bella's beauty had excited much comment—envy among the women, and admiration among the men. "Miss Chevenix—introduce me to her," had been dinned into his ear half the night. "Is she rich, an heiress, or what; is there anything singular about her besides her beauty, Jerry?"

Amid all the gaiety around him Jerry's heart was a heavy one. He now felt that he loved Bella passionately; but the memory of those mortgages, and the view that they would inevitably cause Mr. Chevenix, Bella herself, and all who knew of their peculiarity and existence to take of his love and his attentions, fettered his tongue, and caused him, even when he had the lovely girl all to himself in the solitude of the conservatory, to speak dubiously and enigmatically; thus leading her, in her pride and hauteur, to fear that he was viewing her through the medium of his mother and with her aristocratic eyes; and thus, with all the love of him in her heart, Bella felt that heart revolt at the situation and swell a little with anger.

He shrank from uttering the words that loaded his tongue—the longed for declaration his attentions had given Bella an undoubted right to expect—and she resented because she misunderstood the reason of his not doing so. She dreaded that he had taught her to love him, while looking down upon her position in the world—at least, the world in which he and his mother moved.

"Do you know that all our fellows from the camp, and indeed all my mother's guests, are quite wild in their admiration of you!" he said, in a low voice.

"How kind—how excessively condescending of them!" exclaimed Bella, sharply, opening and shutting her fan again and again.

He regarded her with a little perplexity, and felt his cheek colour.

"And Lady Julia Wilmot—does *she* share in that gust of admiration?" she asked, with an unmistakable curl on her lovely lip.

"Bella—oh, permit me to call you so, as of old? What has come to you—what has offended you?"

"Nothing has come to me—nothing has offended me; but

I should not have come here to-night, and you have no right to call me Bella now !”

“I beg your pardon—the name came naturally to my lips—we were such good friends of old.”

“Your mother does not view us as such. *Her* friendship consists of loftily patronising me, while looking down upon me and my father too. You know this as well as I do, Captain Wilmot.”

Jerry was silent, and thought: “I came here to talk, perhaps of love, and now, by Jove, it seems we are quarrelling!”

His face expressed this and the pain her words gave him; and Bella, ever a creature of impulse, felt that she was froward, petulant, and foolishly irritable; but his mother’s haughty manner had stung her keenly more than once that night.

Jerry sighed and rose from his seat.

“Pardon me,” said she, in her sweet, low voice, and with an upward glance of her light brown eyes that was irresistible; “I know that I am very cross with you, and—I don’t know why.”

“Miss Chevenix——”

“Call me Bella!” said she, impetuously, as she bit the feathers of her fan.

“Oh, Bella, you know not how I am situated with regard to you!” he began, as he thought of the mortgages.

“Oh, I understand it precisely,” said she, flushing deeply. “You are very fond of me, perhaps—admire me very much, of course; but it is an affair of proud relations—high position in the county on the one hand, and the granddaughter of the farmer of Langley Park on the other—that it is? So let us drop our acting; you your mock love-making——”

“Mock love-making!” he exclaimed, sorrowfully and reproachfully.

“Yes; and I shall drop my flirty way. And now let us go back to the dancers; I want papa, and wish to go home.”

“Oh, Bella, you know not—may never, never know—what my mind is struggling with!” he began, in a low and hurried voice, and then paused; for it was strange that jolly Jerry, usually cool, calm, self-reliant in the tumult of the betting-ring, in the business transactions of life, in the hurly-burly of a field-day in the Long Valley, with a dozen of aides-de-camp all bellowing contrary orders to him at once, should be wanting in confidence when alone with Bella Chevenix; and yet perhaps

it was not strange, when those infernal mortgages, which made her an heiress and him a half-ruined man, are remembered.

Young Twesildown's profound admiration for Bella—notwithstanding her snub—admiration openly expressed to himself, and that of more than one other man, had made Jerry feel uncomfortable and savage—all the more that he had begun to assume or feel a right of proprietary in her that in itself was very delightful; but it is said that “a man head over ears in love would feel jealous of his charmer's uncle, not knowing him to be such;” and certainly Jerry Wilmot was in that submerged condition.

“With what is your mind struggling?” asked Bella, with reference to his broken words.

“I know not how to explain.”

“You do look troubled, Captain Wilmot. In your usually merry face one never sees such an expression as it wears now,” said she, surveying his features with her sweet and earnest eyes, full of great and sudden sympathy. “What—amid a scene like this to-night—this gay world of yours, rank and luxury around you—what mental pain have you to struggle with?”

Jerry felt her slender fingers trembling in his hand, and he pressed them softly and caressingly.

“You know not all I have endured of doubt and love too, Bella, since—since——”

“Since when?” she asked, impatiently, but in a low voice.

“That interview I had with your father.”

Her dilated eyes expressed great wonder at this unexpected reply.

“What passed between you?” she asked.

“I cannot tell you—now at least—and so infuse an aspect of selfishness, with bitterness too, in the sweetness of a moment like this.”

“Jerry!” exclaimed the girl, bewildered by his manner.

His name escaped her lips almost unconsciously, but the sound of it then again, as in his boyish days, made every pulse quicken and his heart to thrill.

“Bella, my darling! I love you. You know that I have always loved you, and never anyone else.” (Though this was not precisely the case, just then Jerry thought it was.) “I have struggled against that love till I can do so no longer,”—(Why? thought Bella, with anger growing in her breast)—“struggled against it, but it has overpowered me at last; and though the

world I live in might view the avowal with contempt and derision, and utterly mistake the spirit in which I make it, I do love you dearly, Bella," he added in a low, beseeching voice.

All unknown to himself, this speech in its phraseology was about the most blundering he could have addressed to the haughty Bella Chevenix.

Her beautiful eyes were sparkling with indignation now; her face was blanched and very pale, for she loved Jerry dearly, though at that moment only anger and bitterness were swelling in her breast. She snatched her hand from his clasp, and, cresting up her head, said proudly: "This world of yours shall never know, from me at least, that you have condescended to address me thus. You deem it condescension; I an insult!"

"An insult, Bella?"

"Enough of this: let us rejoin the dancers."

Jerry was utterly bewildered, and led her from the conservatory, on emerging from which the first eyes that met them were those of Lady Julia Wilmot, and they wore an expression at once cold, inquiring, and reprehensive, which added to the annoyance of Bella, who hurriedly, and without a word of adieu to Jerry, took the arm of her father.

The latter had been enjoying himself after his own fashion during a protracted visit to the supper-room, and was by no means yet prepared to withdraw.

She danced with Goring, with Dalton, and in quick succession with all the men who again and again pressed round her, and whose names were on her card, including even the slighted Lord Twesildown, to whom several bumpers of champagne had given fresh courage, while the crushed and bewildered Jerry watched her from the doorway; and none who saw her there in all the radiance of her rare beauty, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushing, her whole face wreathed with smiles, would have imagined the turmoil of angry thoughts surging in her snow-white bosom.

On one hand Lady Julia was intensely irritated to see Jerry looking so *distract*—"put out"—after his too evident confabulation in the conservatory with Miss Chevenix, and on the other she was exasperated to see the fast and furious love and flirtation between that young lady and the vapid Lord Twesildown, as she had views of her own regarding him and Cousin Emily, so Lady Julia was sorely worried by the general results of Jerry's birthday ball.

At last the guests began to depart, and Bella's father led

her away ; Twesildown shawled her in the hall, and handed her into the snug family brougham, and she was driven home through the familiar country lanes and roads like one in a dream.

That Jerry Wilmot, whom, in her secret heart she actually loved so dearly, should have insulted her in that supreme moment of declaring his passion by inference, as she thought, by broadly hinting of her humbler origin and the disparity of their position in society—a disparity his proud mother had often made her feel keenly—stung the impulsive and naturally warm-hearted girl.

She threw off her ball-dress in hot and angry haste, tossed her few ornaments from her, and casting herself upon her bed, wept bitterly in her sense of disappointment and humiliation, while the dim, grey hours of the winter morning stole slowly over the landscape and the silent village of Wilmothurst.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE VISIT.

BELLA CHEVENIX took an early opportunity of questioning her father, though apparently in a casual way, as to the nature of the interview that had taken place between him and Jerry Wilmot—the interview to which the latter had referred so mysteriously and in broken accents.

Mr. Chevenix told her all about it, adding, when he saw how she changed colour, and seemed deeply moved by his information : “Why do you ask, Bella ?”

“Because—I never have secrets from you, papa—he referred to his interview in a very remarkable manner in the conservatory.”

“Did he propose to you ?”

“No, papa,” said Bella, colouring painfully now ; “but he nearly—very nearly did so.”

“A nice move towards paying off the mortgages truly !” said Mr. Chevenix, with a rather contemptuous laugh.

“He *condescended* to express his love for me,” thought Bella, “and a proposal would, of course, have followed ; he would seek to marry me that thereby the encumbrances might be cleared from his estate !”

Her thoughts were very bitter indeed, for now most anxious doubts of the purity and honesty of Jerry's intentions were implanted in her mind; and yet she loved Jerry on one hand quite as much as she—honest girl—derided and despised the inborn and constitutional selfishness of his haughty mother, and all such "aristocratic snobs," as she called them in the angry bitterness of her heart. But she resolved to show Jerry her indifference, and treat him as she thought he deserved to be.

"His selfishness apart, it is the old story," she muttered, "the old story of the earthen pot that sought to swim with those of brass. In his mind, I suppose, I am the earthenware."

At other times, when her real regard for Jerry prevailed, she would think: "Oh, that papa would throw these horrid mortgages in the fire, that I might be poor, and so test the truth of Jerry's love for me. How strange that *my* money and *his* lands should keep us apart! But for this involvement, would he ever have loved me for myself alone?"

If Jerry actually meant all he said, he was certainly not influenced by his mother, whose frigid hauteur to Bella was never concealed; and, if he did mean it, she, Bella Chevenix, might be mistress of Wilmothurst, and send Lady Julia to vegetate at the dower house of Langley Park; but to accept him would be at the price of lowering herself to the level on which he received her.

"No, no," thought Bella, bitterly, as she recalled what she deemed Jerry's most galling speech; "the derision and contempt of the world you live in shall never be excited by hearing my name coupled with yours, Captain Wilmot."

Hitherto Jerry had paid her great, very great and marked attention, but until the night of the ball, and with it that ill-omened *tête-à-tête* in the conservatory, he had gone no farther.

Should she pay a ceremonious call with her father now, or simply send her card to Lady Julia Wilmot?

Bella was sorely perplexed—pride struggling with love—so she went for an afternoon call after the recent festivity, but resolved to be guarded; and, while giving Jerry no opportunity of recurring to the past, show him how utterly she was indifferent to him.

On riding over to Wilmothurst, she and her father were received by Lady Julia and "Cousin Emily" in the drawing-room, from whence Jerry—greatly to her relief—drew her father and Bevil Goring away to his own particular sanctum,

and she was left with the two ladies, whose conversation after the prospects of the weather and events of the ball were discussed, speedily took a turn that poor Bella knew was meant for her edification.

"You made quite a conquest of Lord Twesildown, Miss Chevenix," said Lady Julia, with one of her company smiles.

"And of Jerry, too," added Miss Wilmot.

"We are old friends," said Bella, faintly smiling.

"But Jerry is such a flirt!" exclaimed Lady Julia, remembering the visit to the conservatory. "He has been a worry to me ever since he left Eton, and then I was only too glad to get him off to his regiment."

"Why?"

"The silly boy fell quite in love with a little waiting-maid I had. He regards all women as puppets, and is never in earnest about any of them; seven years of him, I fear, wouldn't prove that Jerry had a heart."

"Jerry always burns much incense at some shrine or other," added Cousin Emily (at whose shrine he had never burned any); "his goddess generally changes with the season or the locality; and we all know how in country quarters the most silly things are developed."

"To make love to the lips that are near has always been poor silly Jerry's way. He is such an incorrigible flirt!"

Bella knew quite enough of the world to know what prompted these remarks, and many more that followed, together with the memory of a subtle, soft, and sympathetic manner towards herself that galled her by its implication.

With all her apparent sweetness of manner, Cousin Emily was a good hater; so she hated Bella Chevenix, and felt that if she could traverse Jerry's too probable love affair with, or penchant for, that young lady she would do so; she was too well-bred, or too careful, to show her hand, and yet she showed a dexterity almost devilish in implanting in Bella's mind serious thoughts of poor Jerry, and of adding to, or confirming, those which existed there already.

There was a slight, yet decided contraction of Bella's forehead as she listened to these speeches; a slight twitching, too, of the lovely lips; but a proud disdain of the speakers was chiefly what she felt.

Lady Julia could detect that much of Bella's natural *verve* and vivacity were gone; yet she was compelled, mentally, to

admit that Bella was a splendid-looking girl—bright, beautiful, and graceful, to a degree—as she sat there in her well-fitted riding habit, than which few costumes are more becoming to a pretty woman.

During a country-house visit of nearly half an hour, she thought she had heard enough, and more than enough, of Jerry's fickleness and flirtations, and rose to withdraw; but a storm of snow rendered her departure impossible just then; her own and her father's horse had been taken round to the stable-yard; she had now the dread of being perhaps some hours in the society of Jerry, and deeply deplored her weakness in coming, feeling that she would require some art to show the indifference she had resolved to exhibit; thus, when the gentlemen joined them again, she spoke almost exclusively to Bevil Goring and Lord Twesildown, or remained silent, for she was intensely anxious to be gone.

If the usually gay Bella said little generally in Lady Julia's presence, she observed keenly, and her somewhat shy and haughty manner to her hostess was to a certain extent assumed, as the result of her secret resentment of the mode in which that dame was disposed to view and treat her.

"Cousin Emily" had been more than once painfully conscious that when "the agent's daughter" was present she was relegated completely to the background, and that even Jerry cared not to flirt or make fun with her, so much was he absorbed in Bella Chevenix; and, though in some respects rather a nice girl, she began to conceive, as we have said, an animosity against her, and to consider how she could bring about a rupture between them before Jerry's leave of absence expired. "We do not," says a writer, "resort to such clumsy expedients as daggers and poisoned bowls in the nineteenth century; but vindictive people deal out as cruel reprisals, even now-a-days, in good society, though it is etiquette to receive the fatal thrust with an easy smile, and wrestle with your anguish in the silence of your chamber."

But to Emily's great surprise she found that Jerry and Miss Chevenix scarcely addressed each other; that there was a complete change in their bearing; that the latter chatted gaily with Goring and others, and seemed at times utterly oblivious of Jerry's presence.

She was much exercised in her mind by this discovery. What did it import?

Jerry seemed reserved and *distrain*, while at times Miss Chevenix seemed gayer than ever, and when she was in the billiard-room with him, Goring, and Twesildown, and ever so many more men, she actually acted somewhat like a romp, while showing how many times she could hit running off the red ball—"a nice accomplishment for a young lady!" as Lady Julia Wilmot remarked when she was told of it after.

But all the gentlemen were enchanted with Bella, and were full of admiration at the grace and contour of her figure as she handled her cue with hands of matchless form and whiteness; and when she did take her departure it was Twesildown that assisted her to mount, and adjusted her skirt and reins, but Jerry remained behind in the *porte-cochère*, and simply lifted his hat, while a heavy load lay on his heart. Her reception of his love-making on the one hand, her wounded pride on the other, and the knowledge that she was under the keen and cynical eyes of Lady Julia and his cousin, had combined to make the protracted visit a most painful one to both. So two of the actors in our little drama separated, sore with each other and bitter in heart—no longer *en rapport*.

"I am glad that girl is gone at last," remarked his mother. "She is not fit for polished society, or to associate with Emily."

"I have heard," said that young lady, "that when at Brighton she tried to become a professional beauty, by having her photo in every shop-window."

"How wonderfully well you well-bred women can make those you hate or envy feel that you look down upon them!" said Jerry, angrily.

"I have no doubt she feels amply compensated for all that by the flattery and attention of the gentlemen; she is quite a kind of garrison beauty," retorted Emily.

"Why are all your remarks on that girl so dashed with vinegar—decided Chili?" asked Jerry.

"She gives herself airs far above her station in life."

"Tush; we are all descended from Adam and Eve—a gardener and his wife."

"You will never convince me that there is not good and bad blood in this world," exclaimed Lady Julia.

"Bravo, mater—cast the scheme of creation anew! What are the odds so long as we are happy. But I think the time has now come when you should know the influence this young lady's father may have in our affairs,"

Jerry now put before his horrified mother—horrified to hear of their necessity—the matter of the mortgages, and the full extent of these, and urged that she should show Bella some more marked attention, and less hauteur or supercilious indifference, and have her more often at the mansion house, to the guests at which she—a handsome girl, full of natural gaiety, and with a decided turn for charades, *tableaux-vivants*, private theatricals, lawn-tennis, and games of all kinds—would prove invaluable.

But Lady Julia heard him in silence, with a knit of her pencilled eyebrows and a droop in the corners of her handsome mouth. She could only think of these horrible mortgages, and the awful humiliation of half the estate being in the hands of Mr. Chevenix.

"The estate seems to be quite slipping from me," said Jerry, after a gloomy pause.

"Slipping?"

"Yes, it is guineas to gooseberries that the rest will follow Langley Park and so forth."

"Terrible to think—not to be thought of at all! Why, the estate has been the home of the Wilmots for four hundred years."

"We can never recover what has been lost."

"Unless you make a wealthy marriage, Jerry dear—such as you have every right to look forward to."

Jerry shrugged his shoulders, and pulled dreamily at his cigar after flicking the white ash off it.

"Let the mortgaged land go!" he exclaimed. "I do not mean to dedicate my life by clearing that for others, which others did not clear for me."

"Jerry!"

"Remember, mater dear, I have had only a little, and not all, to do in bringing matters to this pass with Wilmothurst, and I decline to act the part of a family martyr."

"What will society say?"

"Society be hanged! I have read in a book, and I know it to be truth, that 'Society at its best will entertain you if you amuse it, and will drop you, as a rule, upon the first suspicion of your wanting a twenty-pound note. Society saps your energy, snaps your finances, and a half-a-dozen good attorneys are fifty times more valuable acquaintances than half the peerage would be at present.'"

"Where on earth do you pick up such detestable opinions,

Jerry Wilmot?" exclaimed his mother, holding up her white hands in dismay, while she began seriously to consider where a suitable bride with a long purse could be found and urged upon his attention.

He meanwhile was chiefly engaged in remembering how, at the ball, Miss Chevenix had—after that rather sensational interview in the conservatory—gone off at once into an incipient flirtation with "that utter oaf," young Twesildown; but where is the woman who, believing herself to be treated as Bella thought she had been, would have thrown away a chance of retaliation and revenge, when a handsome young man of rank seemed disposed to devote himself to her?

CHAPTER XXV.

DOUBTING.

PRIOR to that affair in the conservatory, Bella had been to him all that a man had a right to expect—that is, a man who had not definitely declared himself; now that he had done so, she had thrown him completely over.

"What strong running I might make with her beyond a doubt, but for those accursed mortgages!" said Jerry to Bevil Goring, as they lounged in the smoking-room. "She thinks I do not want her for herself, but to rid me of these, and values my love accordingly—despises me, in short," added Jerry, bitterly, "and I am without the means of undeceiving her."

"He despises me for my humble origin, and even as much as admitted that his friends would view a *mésalliance* with contempt—yes, that was the word," was the thought of Bella; "yet his debts and the mortgages together made his royal highness stoop to act the lover to me. Surely, after the past, I deserved something better than this!"

He knew and she knew that for some time before their affair had been looked upon as "a case;" that men began to make way for him whenever she was concerned, and that, in short, they would soon get talked about if they did not come to terms or separate; and now the separation had come to pass in a way neither could have foreseen.

A man like Jerry, who rode to hounds and at hurdle races, who shot, fished, rowed, and did everything else with such

heartly good-will, was little likely "to play the fool with his little girl," thought Mr. Chevenix, from whom Bella had no concealments. He could not be base enough; but Mr. Chevenix knew not what to think, and in the first transport of his anger, but for her piteous appeals, would have foreclosed the mortgages, and perhaps thus have forced Jerry out of the Queen's service.

Any way, she must try not to love him now; love was over, she thought, and she would never, never love again.

Jerry would no doubt marry some one else—especially if money was his object, as she doubted not it was; and they—who were so near being very dear to each other—might meet in years to come as mere acquaintances, if even that! Her eyes filled with tears, and she drummed her little foot passionately on the floor at the visions she conjured up, and felt how difficult it is to obliterate or transfer affection at a moment's notice.

One moment she would say to herself that she never wished to see her lover's face again, especially if all, or even a half, were true that his mother and cousin hinted of his character, and all she suspected of his selfishness and pride; and the next moment she did *so* long to see him once more, and made herself utterly miserable with the fear that he might return to Aldershot without visiting the village again.

And so these two, who certainly loved each other well, and might have done so fondly and dearly for life, were both making themselves miserable through a very natural mistake—Bella deeming Jerry selfish and vain, Jerry deeming her views of him unjust, or that his love was what she suspected it to be, the outcome of cold-blooded policy, crushing inborn and absurd pride of family and position!

So Bella's mind was in a whirl of contending emotions; one time striving to believe in her lover's good faith, and the next endorsing the opinion of her good, easy, and affectionate father: that he had but one object in view—those horrible mortgages.

It was while the latter views were uppermost in her angry thoughts that Jerry Wilmot—his leave having expired, and he and Bevil Goring on the eve of their return to Aldershot Camp—rode over to the village to pay a farewell call.

Bella saw him from the window riding down the village street and across the green, and her heart beat wildly as she gave breathlessly a hurried message to one of the servants, and

then rushed upstairs to her room. She heard Jerry inquire for Mr. Chevenix. He was from home. Then he asked for Miss Chevenix, and was told she was at home, but had a headache, and was unable to receive visitors.

Jerry hesitated; he knew well enough that in society "a headache," when ladies were concerned, meant "not at home;" and, leaving a card with P. P. C. pencilled in a corner thereof, turned his horse's head, and, quitting the village at a canter, never once looked back.

Thus Bella, by yielding to a momentary gust of pride and temper, prompted by her then mood of mind, lost the only opportunity that might ever occur of having the cloud that hovered between them dispelled, and some explanation perhaps made.

But "lovers from time immemorial have always shown much dexterity in the mismanagement of their own affairs," says a novelist, and thus this pair were no exception to the general rule.

"Well," he muttered, as his canter increased to a gallop, "absence is a curative process; and absence in Africa will be an exciting addition thereto."

Bella, as she wept on seeing him disappear, was not aware of one circumstance that made Jerry spur his horse viciously. As he entered the village at one end he had seen Lord Twesildown riding out of it at the other, and not unnaturally, he connected "Bella's headache" with that circumstance; but the young lord's appearance there was, in reality, the merest chance contingency in the world.

"He is not one bit in love with me," thought Bella, when days succeeded each other in slow and monotonous succession, and Jerry came no more. "Well, he has inflicted a sore blow upon my woman's vanity"

She became moped and full of *ennui*; day followed day in monotonous succession, and she sat by a window with a novel in her hand unread, or some piece of feminine work forgotten, listlessly watching the leafless and dripping trees, for the season was dreary, wet and stormy; the mist crept up from the adjacent stream and whitened all the gardens and the village green; and a cold, a sheeny, a wan crescent moon came out over Wilmot Woods.

"What a life I live just now!" sighed Bella; "one might as well be in one's grave as here at Wilmothurst."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT ALDERSHOT.

SOME weeks had now passed since Bevil Goring last saw Alison Cheyne—weeks that seemed ages to him !

If weeks seem interminable when a pair of hopeful lovers are thus separated and can count to a day when they shall meet again, absence “making their hearts grow fonder,” what must they seem to those who are hopelessly apart and kept in utter ignorance of each other’s movements, thoughts, and plans !

Mrs. Trelawney at Chilcote Grange heard nothing of her young friend, or of Lord Cadbury, and though the movements of the “upper ten” are pretty accurately chronicled in the Society papers, as they are named, no record was given of those in the yacht, which Goring attributed to its voyaging in the Mediterranean ; yet he thought it most singular that it had not been heard of turning up at Naples, Palermo, Civita Vecchia, Malta, or elsewhere affected by tourists and travellers.

Had Alison by this time bent to the circumstances that surrounded her—bent to her father’s influence, and, in utter weariness of heart and despair of escape, accepted Lord Cadbury—been married to him perhaps ?

The public prints would in these days of watchful and incessant paragraphing have duly announced such an event ; but now to be destined for foreign service, and for a protracted and doubtful period, the dangers of war and climate apart, rendered the chances of their ever meeting again extremely problematical.

If there is any place in the world where lasting or temporary care might find an antidote, it is the great camp at Aldershot, with its thousands of horse, foot and artillery, the incessant parading and marching, bugling and drumming, and amid the sociality of a regiment, with its merry mess, “the perfection of dinner society,” as Lever calls it ; but Bevil Goring shrank from it as soon as he could, and often preferred the solitude of his leaky hut—we say leaky, for those residences erected by the economical John Bull admit both wind and rain most freely through their felt roofs and red-painted wooden walls. And therein he chummed with Jerry, now a changed and somewhat moody fellow, addicted to heavy smoking and frequent brandy and sodas.

Dalton, too, would seem not to have made much progress with the gay widow during their absence at Wilmothurst, and seemed to have seen but little of her lately.

Ere long, unless the regiment departed betimes, they would have the spring drills before them ; but there was every prospect of a speedy move, so their comrades congratulated themselves on the chance of escaping being perhaps under canvas in the North Camp, days of toil in the Long Valley, when the eyes, nose, and ears—yea, the pores of the skin, were often filled with dust ; often being under arms from 9 a.m. till 4.30 p.m., with no other rations than a mouthful of Aldershot sand. Even the prospect of fighting in the dense African bush was deemed better work than that.

One morning, after tubbing, and lingering over coffee and cigars in their patrol jackets, with O'Farrel in attendance, before morning parade, the corporal who acted as regimental postman brought Goring and Jerry their letters. There was only one for the former, but several for the latter, who regarded them ruefully, and said : "What the devil is the use of opening them—they are all to amount of account rendered—blue envelopes," and, after glancing leisurely at each, he cast it into the fire. "I thought so ! That ——— tailor in the Strand. I gave him a remittance two years ago ; should be thankful if he is ever paid at all. Account for a bracelet—got that in Bond Street for Emily ; that vet's account for my horse ; Healy's for boots of all kinds—pomades, gloves—no fellow can do without them ; but then there is the interest accumulating on these mortgages, and as I won't pick up much prize money, though it is the Gold Coast we are bound for, I'll be up a tree one of these days. But, hollo, Bevil, old man, what does your solitary epistle contain ?" he suddenly exclaimed, when, on glancing at his friend, he saw that the latter had changed colour, that he became very pale and then flushed red, while, as he read over his letter for the third time, his hands trembled so much that the paper rustled.

Goring then passed one hand across his forehead as if a little bewildered, and then handed the document to Jerry, saying : "Read for yourself."

"Does it concern Miss Cheyne ?" asked Jerry.

"Please God it may in time," was the curious reply of Goring, as he put a dash of brandy into his coffee, and then looked over the shoulder of Jerry to re-peruse his letter.

It ran thus :

“Gray’s Inn Square.

“DEAR SIR,

“We have the pleasure to inform you that by the death of your father’s much respected cousin, Bevil Goring, Esq., of Chowringee, Calcutta, you have become his heir to a fortune of considerably above £20,000 per annum in India stock, Bank shares, Central India and other railway shares, &c., the items of which we shall send you fully detailed in a few days. We shall take all the necessary measures about proving the will, and, trusting that we shall be continued as your legal advisers,

We are, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

“TAYPE, SHAWRPE, AND SCRAWLY,
“*Solicitors.*”

More accustomed to wealth, and personally less interested in the document, Jerry took in the situation at once.

“Whoop !” he exclaimed, as he wrung Goring’s hand. “Whoop and hurrah ! I congratulate you, I do, from my heart and soul, old fellow. There’s not a soul in the Brigade deserves good fortune more than you do. What a trump this old Bevil was to die just in the nick of time before the route came !”

“What do you mean by that, Jerry ?”

“You’ll be sending in your papers—cutting the Rifles now. A fortune, by Jove—I always knew you had expectations, as they are called.”

“Every fellow has. They are often, too often, bad things to rely upon ; and yet how few—how very few amongst us can resist the temptation of doing so in some fashion or other. But as for quitting the corps—with war rumours in the air too—by Jove, that is the last thing I should think of doing.”

“Egad ! What a night we’ll have of it at the mess hut to-night—a jolly deep drink, and have the band out !”

“I wish this fortune—money or whatever it is—had only come a little sooner,” said Goring, as his thoughts fled at once to the absent Alison.

“Better late than never !”

“There sounds the bugle, and now for everyday life, and a truce to the world of dreams if possible ! What a lot I shall be able to do now for the men of my company—their wives and little ones—for the corps generally !”

"Only take care that the mess don't begin to look upon you as their factor, and be seized with a singular desire to possess your autograph. I know what that sort of thing means," added Jerry, as his mind wandered to Mr. Chevenix and the mortgages.

"The worst of being poor is that one can never follow one's inclinations for good."

"Or for evil," added Jerry cynically.

Never in his life before did Bevil Goring pass so extraordinary a time as in the parade of that morning. In the pre-occupation of his mind he made such a number of mistakes that the colonel and adjutant—knowing that he was one of their most perfect officers—were at their wits' end with surprise; though on parade, as in anything else, a man may act correctly and acquit himself by mere force of habit; with Goring, in this instance, it was not so.

It was not the fortune that had so suddenly accrued to him, nor the amplitude thereof, which affected him thus; it was only because the said fortune—"the filthy lucre, the root of all evil," as it is wrongly stigmatised—might be, with him, the means of a great and happy end.

It might be the means, ere too late, of saving Alison Cheyne from a life of misery, could he only discover her; but where was she? In what direction was he to turn his steps—for that he would search, he had resolved, if the corps did not depart, as seemed too probable, in a short time now.

Amid the routine of the parade these busy thoughts filled his brain, and in "telling off" the battalion, when Dalton called out "Number one, Right Company," Goring responded with "No. 20,000, Left Company," at least so Jerry Wilmot asserted.

All rejoiced in the good fortune of Goring, for he was a favourite with people generally, and, as for the members of his battalion of the Rifle Brigade, he was a "pet" with them all, from the colonel down to the youngest little bugle boy; they loved him for his good temper, good heart, and the strict impartiality with which he discharged his duties to all.

In the dawn of fresh hopes and the confidence which having a well-lined pocket gives, he found himself at mess, joining heartily in the laughter his own mistakes created, and "standing" many rounds of champagne in response to the congratulations of his brother officers on all hands.

He felt that wealth gave power.

"Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the laws," says Goldsmith.

In wealth he was still inferior to Cadbury, and the latter was a peer, he—Bevil Goring—was a gentleman by many descents, and that, he knew, counted much by Sir Ranald Cheyne. Could he but trace the latter now !

"Letters of Readiness" came, and it was fully announced that the corps was destined to take part in the war against Ashanti ; but, with all his military ardour, his zeal for the service and desire to add to the distinction he had already won in India, Bevil Goring,—situated as he was with regard to Alison Cheyne, with his great chance of losing her for ever—was not sorry when he found he was one of those "detailed" for the *depôt*, and would thus, for a time at least, be left behind in England, and free to search and look about him.

But before the "Queen's morning drum" has announced in Aldershot the morning on which the regiments march for embarkation—and before Bevil Goring discovers the lost traces of his lost love—we have the two last appeals to record of two pairs of lovers, appeals which had very different sequels eventually ; and the first we shall relate is that of Jerry Wilmot.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JERRY'S LAST APPEAL.

"THE last time we three shall ride out of this gate together. Whenever I do anything with a conviction that it is for the last time, I always feel unconsciously a kind of sadness come over me. What do you think, Jerry ?"

The speaker was Goring, as he, Dalton, and Jerry Wilmot quitted the North Camp on horseback and separated—the two former, in hunting costume, to have a "spin" with the Royal Buckhounds, the latter to the household at Wilmothurst, to which an hour or two more brought him by train ; and to the last interview with his mother, one brief enough—too brief for Jerry's taste, as he found Lady Julia—afternoon tea over—preparing to pay some carriage visits in the vicinity.

Her French maid, Mademoiselle Florine, was in the act of dressing her ladyship's hair, and, as that was a very important

matter, she could barely turn her head to bid farewell to Jerry, who stood near her looking irresolute, reproachful, and wistful with his heart and his eyes full together.

Lady Julia Wilmot, whilom a graceful beauty—a handsome woman still—had a theory that worry of any kind told unfavourably on the female face, that thought wrinkled the forehead, puckered the eyes and mouth, and consequently she never thought or worried herself about anything, and therefore was wonderfully young-looking and smooth-visaged for her years—being one of the best preserved women in England. She had a marquise air of bygone days about her, as the flattering Mademoiselle Florine often said, and suggesting to her mind patches and powdered hair, a long stomacher, hoop or sacque, and pomander ball.

“Actually going, and to that horrid place, my poor boy,” she said, without quite turning her face towards him. “You should have gone into the Guards, Jerry, and have done your soldiering in Pall Mall and at Windsor.”

“The Guards, mother,” exclaimed Jerry, as he thought of his mortgages. “Before I return, if I ever return at all, you may have to cut down the Wilmot woods, and put down your carriages and horses.”

“Why, and for what?”

“To pay Mr. Chevenix his overdue interest.”

“Don’t talk of him. I detest his name. By the way, Twesildown calls there occasionally, I believe, the result of your introduction at the ball—and has given the girl a huge fox-terrier.”

“A fox-terrier! Curious present for a lady.”

“Very suitable in this instance, I should say.”

“And now, mother dearest—good-bye.”

Her cold manner and frigid kiss from her half-turned face, as Florine brushed out her hair, pained him. He gave her another farewell glance, and as he saw her slim figure, her perfect feet and hands, her placid face and still magnificent hair, which Mademoiselle Florine was deftly manipulating, he felt that all her retention of apparent youth was due to her utter want of heart; and, after receiving a somewhat effusive kiss from Cousin Emily, he thought of betaking himself to the path that led to the house of Mr. Chevenix.

Albeit, used as ~~he was~~ to his aristocratic mother’s fashionable demeanour and coldness of heart, Jerry’s grew sore at the

general mode and tenor of his farewell under all the circumstances. Thus he clung more fondly to the hope that Bella Chevenix might be more tender, and send him away with kindly thoughts of home and Old England.

He passed through the drawing-room, where his mother and cousin had just had their afternoon tea. It was flooded with sunlight, and the delicate Wedgwood china and silver tea equipage were yet on the blue velvet gipsy table. It was a magnificent apartment; flowers from the conservatory were in old-fashioned china bowls on the marble consoles, and in rich majolica jardinières between the windows; and Jerry sighed as he gave a farewell glance and turned away.

His mother might be deprived of all that luxury ere he returned to look upon it again, if—as he said before—he ever returned at all; for many were doubtless doomed to leave their bones amid the primeval forests that overshadowed the Prah river and the wild jungles of horrible Coomassie.

The somewhat pert Mademoiselle Florine, who looked as if she had no objection should the handsome Jerry have kissed *her*, began to sob when he withdrew, an emotion which “my Lady” at once snubbed by a calm, steady, and inquiring stare, for she was a cold, proud woman, who, with all her remains of undoubted beauty, had outlived all the memory of her youth, and the genial impulses of her youth, if she ever had them. And she had to the fullest extent that which a writer curiously styles “the intense vulgarity which passes by the name of high-breeding.”

Remembering—he had never forgotten it—the tenor of his last conversation with Bella Chevenix and the way in which it ended, it was not without a doubt whether he could see her if alone, and with a certain clamorous emotion in his heart, that Jerry Wilmot—the usually jolly and unabashed Jerry—approached the great red-bricked square villa that overlooked the village green, and the walls of which were covered by masses of Virginia creepers, roses, and clematis in summer.

“Mr. Chevenix was out—had ridden over to Langley Park,” was the response of the domestic who received Jerry’s card.

“Ah, considers it his own property, like the other places, no doubt,” was the thought of Jerry, without anger, however.

“Miss Chevenix?”

“Is at home, sir.”

Another moment, and he was face to face with the smiling and brilliant Bella, who received him with something of a flutter. A hot colour swept through the girl's soft face, and, retiring as suddenly, left her rather pale.

"I hope I don't intrude on you," said Jerry, seized with a curious access of bashfulness. "I find you sitting, full of thought, with your head on one side, like a canary."

"Was I?" said she, caressing a great fox-terrier, with a plated collar—Twesildown's present, no doubt, thought Jerry.

The latter had called in the hope of having a solemn leave-taking, if not something better—one of those eternal adieux peculiar, he thought, to heroes and heroines in novels and plays; thus he was rather bewildered to find that Bella began to run on in a style of conversation (adopted to cover her own nervousness or chagrin) that was "sparkling;" thus she chatted away, without waiting for answers, on subjects culled from the Society papers, fashionable journals, and so forth, leaving him for a time, as he thought, "unable to get a word in, even edgeways," till he announced to her that "the battalion had received its letters of readiness, and that the route had come."

At these tidings her manner and colour changed at once, and her voice and eyes softened, as she said: "And you are really going away?"

"At last."

"At last!"

"To Ashanti."

"Yes, to Ashanti," he replied.

Both seemed as if afraid to trust themselves to words of their own. What he was doing while he spake he scarcely knew; but he was trying to fit on the top of his fingers in succession a tiny silver thimble picked from her work-basket, and in every case without success.

The doubts in the mind of each still kept the cold cloud between them—she believing that the love he might speak of again was prompted by worldly selfishness combating with family pride; he fearing that she received his love as inspired by fear of the mortgages alone.

"Surely this is very sudden?" said she, after a pause.

"Oh no, we have expected to move for some time past—you will miss me, I hope?"

"We have not seen much of you lately."

"However, I should like to take with me into my place of exile—for such I deem it—a knowledge, a hope that you did miss me a little."

Bella was about to reply, what she knew not, but a choking emotion came into her white slender throat. Jerry saw the emotion, and gathering courage, said: "Do you remember, Bella, that more than once I had struggled with the love with which you had inspired me till I could keep the secret no longer?"

Jerry was still on the wrong tack, and was again terribly misunderstood. Bella's pride and indignation came again to her aid, and she replied with a haughty smile: "I am not likely to forget, Captain Wilmot. Women do not forget such speeches, or when a friend takes up the *rôle* of a lover; but, after what you *did* say, we can never be the same to each other again."

"What did I say?" he exclaimed, regarding her earnestly and wistfully. "I remember that I made you an honest and straightforward avowal of the love that was in my heart, Bella."

"Perhaps—but I only remember the terms in which you did make it," replied Bella, in whose mind the unfortunate and misconstrued term "contempt of the world" was rankling.

"Once again, Bella," said he with his hand stretched out towards her, and a great expression of entreaty in his eyes—"will you be my wife, will you marry me?"

"It cannot be," said she, with a firmness that was not entirely assumed; "but let us part friends."

"Nothing more?" he asked sadly.

"Nothing more," she replied, in a choking voice.

In her angry pride of heart, one moment she had gone near to hating him, but she does not hate him now—oh, far, far from it, when looking upon the handsome and earnest face, as perhaps she may be doing for the last time, but, so far as her words go, she is as unyielding as ever. A little indignation at her hardness began to gather in Jerry's heart, and he said in a light tone of reproach: "Of course, it is too much to expect an English girl to give up—on a sudden, too—the comforts of an English home, the prospect of a season in London and another at Brighton, to broil with a poor devil on the Gold Coast, and share a South African bungalow."

Bella took a peculiar view of this speech, and believed it was a sudden way of "shelving herself," as she had refused him. She knew nothing of the military etiquette and iron rule that prevented an officer from quitting in any way after letters

of readiness came, and thought that Jerry might retire when he pleased, marry and keep his wife at home. She gave a little disdainful smile and remained silent, so Jerry spoke again: "When I was a big boy in knickerbockers, and you were a little girl in short frocks, we used to be like Paul and Virginia in the Wilmot Woods."

"Well, Paul and Virginia have grown up, and the young lady has come to her senses."

"If the gentleman has not."

"He has come to his senses too, and has his eyes very wide open indeed."

"She is referring to those infernal mortgages," thought Jerry (which was the case), "and how shall I ever undeceive her?"

"In our boy and girl time you would have trusted me," he urged.

"Perhaps; but I did not know you as I do now, and the world you live in."

"The past, Bella——"

"Is past, Captain Wilmot; let us not refer to it again. I do not understand you."

"May I—can I—dare I explain?" he began, impetuously.

"Certainly not—there is nothing I wish explained," said she, warmly, though tears were in her eyes, and, as they seemed to be almost "sparring now," Jerry rose to withdraw, yet lingered, with a heavy, loving, and angry heart, and said: "To me you are in no way what you were once, Bella, and what I hoped you might have been. When I was last in Wilmothurst I saw that puppy Twesildown hovering about; surely you—you don't encourage him?"

This was a blunt and unfortunate speech, for Bella's brown eyes sparkled as she asked hotly: "How dare you think, much less ask, if I would encourage anyone?"

"I don't know—pardon me; I scarcely know what I think or what I say."

"So it seems."

Both were standing now, but apart. Oh, how Jerry longed to take her in his arms and pour his farewell kisses on her lips and hair and eyes; but this was not to be.

"How hard you are with me!" said he, after a pause.

"Have you deserved that I should be otherwise?"

"My mother has said——"

"Oh, I am infinitely obliged to Lady Julia for her opinion

of me, of course," said Bella, cresting up her beautiful head ; "but what *has* she said of me ?"

"That you are the greatest flirt in Hampshire, and that, young as you are, you have flirted with every man that came near you."

"I think you must know more of me than she does, and may know how much of all this is true ; but she told me the same of you, and even more, and that she could not get you off to your regiment soon enough."

"Why ?" asked Jerry, with surprise.

"Because of a *tendresse* for her own maid ; and that you have been making love to every woman and girl since. But all this gossip does not concern me, so let the conversation end. You came to bid me good-bye ?"

"Yes," said Jerry, in a hard tone.

"Had you not better bid papa good-bye too ? I think I heard him come in."

She put her hand upon the bell.

"Stay one moment—stay !" he said imploringly.

She looked down and played nervously with the silver bangles on her wrist, some of them the gift of Jerry in happier moments.

"Consider once again," said he, brokenly ; "think of what my life will be apart from you. Will you dream of me when I am gone ?"

"Why should I dream—and dreams come unbidden ?"

"Think of me, then ?"

"A waste of time, surely. I shall have much to think of—papa and my poor people."

"Why do you speak like this to me ?" he said, with a flash of indignation. "Is it because each day sees me a poorer and your father a richer man ? Or has another touched your heart ?"

An angry smile curled her lip at this question. She recollected the scene in the conservatory, and remembered it has been said that "a woman never yields an inch, however innocently and generously, to a man that he does not suspect her, sooner or later, of having given way in a similar manner to some man who has come *earlier*."

"I listen to all this too late. I know your motive. I thank you for the honour you condescend to do me, but let the matter end," said Bella, while a shuddering sigh escaped her pale lips, for her respiration came in little proud gasps and her heart

throbbed painfully—painfully for the part that pride inspired, and a doubt of the purity of Jerry's love, though at the time loving him dearly herself. It was every way a curious situation, and at last Jerry took up his hat and gloves.

"We have been somewhat apart of late," said he; "yet I do not wish—that—that we should part coldly."

"Oh, no; why should we?" she asked, in her sweetest tone. "I am," she thought, "in reality—but for the encumbrances on his estate—nothing more to him than all the other girls he has talked to, laughed with, and flirted with, as his cold hard mother told me. So let me be on my guard—on my guard!"

"You will—most probably—be married before I return, if I ever return at all, which God only can foresee," he said.

"I may never marry," said Bella, with a curious ring in her voice.

"But you *will* think of me, Bella, won't you—broiling and fighting in far away Africa, won't you? I would not like to think that you quite forgot me."

"Nor shall I," said she, making a superhuman effort to repress her tears.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He was gone—gone, and no kiss was exchanged between those two—only a clinging pressure of the hand and that was all!

Could it be that, after all, he was no more to her—through her misconception and doubt of him—than a stick or a stone? If her assumed calm covered—as it really did—a sore, sore heart, how was he to know it?

With her hands interlaced above her head, as if to stay the throbbing of her brain, and her swelling eyes cast upward, she said, in a husky voice: "If I have erred, oh! may heaven protect him, and make his life happy in some other way!"

However, she did not say with *another*.

When Jerry was fairly gone, it seemed to Bella that an unnatural stillness—a hush fell over all the house. She threw open a window to court the cool atmosphere, for her temples were hot and quivering; she could hear the murmur of the stream and the rustle of the trees, in shadow now, as the sun had crept round to the back of the house, and a gloom was falling on the landscape, even as a gloom was sinking on her heart; and she began to upbraid herself with hardness and cruelty, and to feel she might never know rest again.

And Jerry's voice lingered in her ears, as the expression of his face clung to her memory, and, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, she wailed in her heart: "Oh, he is going away, and I have acted a cruel part to him—away to face death, and our parting seems like a farewell of the dying; and his love for me may be true, tender, and honest, after all! If so, what will he—what must he think of me? But it is over and done with—over and done with now!"

And she took refuge in floods of bitter, bitter tears. When for good or for evil, for love and for peace, should she see Jerry Wilmot again? Too probably, never more!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GAME THAT TWO CAN PLAY.

GORING and Dalton had gone to a meet of the Royal Buckhounds, as we have stated in the preceding chapter, and the day's run had been a brilliant one. The gathering took place at Salt Hill again, and there was a large field, comprising the Master of the Hounds, the usual followers of the latter, and a vast assemblage of spectators, on whom the two officers looked with some interest, as it might be the last time they might see such a sight again—together at least.

The hounds ran the deer by Stoke Park to Farnham village, near which he got hung up in a wire fence, but broke away to the left and got shelter in Brocas Wood, but only for a time. Driven out by the dogs, and followed by a vast field, including many men in pink with faultless tops, and not a few ladies, he was taken at last in Hedgerley Park.

Somewhere thereabout, at the close of the run, Goring lost sight of Dalton, who, when leaping his horse over a hedge into a lane, nearly came in contact with Mrs. Trelawney, who had also been at the meet, but by him unseen hitherto. The animal she rode reared wildly, but she soothed it, and Dalton caught it by the bridle.

"Pray pardon me," he exclaimed; "had I been a little nearer——"

"You might have unhorsed me," said she, laughing.

She looked very bright and handsome in her riding-habit; the *chef d'œuvre* of some London tailor, it fitted her to perfection, and, being of a bright blue colour, suited her brilliant complexion and blond style of beauty. A French writer says,

"There is but one way in which a woman can be handsome, but a hundred thousand in which she can be pretty;" and Mrs. Trelawney had those ways in perfection.

Since his last visit Dalton had not seen her, and many of the speeches she had in her petulance or pride permitted herself to say rankled in his memory, exciting anger, sorrow, and surprise; while she, on her part, had been thinking that she had gone quite far enough in the game she was playing with him—for that she was playing a *game* we shall ere long show—and had been anxiously hoping he would come to Chilcote Grange at least once more ere the departure of his regiment, of which event she had heard a rumour, but he never came.

There was a little constraint in the manner of both, but being too natural to act, it soon passed off.

"I was just thinking of you, curious to say, when you came flying over that hedge," said Mrs. Trelawney, with a smile in her bright, bewitching hazel eyes, while the dark lashes that fringed their white lids seemed to flicker. Oh, those wonderful hazel eyes! thought Dalton, as he replied: "Well, it is said to be always a good point in a man's favour when a pretty woman thinks about him in any way. And what were you thinking?"

"That I was certain we had not seen the last of each other—you remember I said so."

"It is my last day with the hounds. To-morrow my horses go to Tattersall's. And you have done us the honour of following the field to-day?" he added, as they rode slowly side by side.

"No—I only came to see them throw off, and am now riding home."

"A pretty mare that of yours, and takes her fences like a bird, Goring told me."

"I never engage in these sports that way now."

"Why?"

"Because I am getting too old," she replied, with a pretty demure expression.

"Old—is this a joke?"

"Besides, I must be careful of myself for little Nettie's sake. If aught happened to me——"

"You are an expert whip—here is a low hedge, and I shall be charmed to give you a lead."

"Thanks—no; I would rather not."

How soldierly Tony Dalton looked, she was thinking, with his bronzed complexion, thoughtful, dark eyes, his dark shorn hair, and long moustache a shade darker, his erect and well-knit figure sitting well down in his saddle, his hunting-coat soiled and stained by service and exposure to the weather.

"Then you have seen enough of the sport?" said he.

"Quite, and am now taking the road homeward."

"Permit me to escort you."

She bowed her assent. There was no reason why he should not do so, and an expression of triumph made her eyes sparkle, and then she asked: "Has Captain Goring utterly failed as yet to discover a trace of where Miss Cheyne has sailed to, or rather of where her father has taken her?"

"Yes—quite."

"It is very singular—people don't disappear in that way now-a-days. Poor Goring! He is, I know, so passionately attached to her, but her father's opposition is so resolute that I think he should school himself——"

"To relinquish her? Oh, no—we cannot control our love, Mrs. Trelawney—can we?"

"I think not."

"If we could—if we could——"

"What a deal of trouble would be spared us in this world," said she, laughing; "but Sir Ranald Cheyne is, no doubt, still unaware that Captain Goring is now a very rich man, and will, I hear, remain in England for a little time yet."

"A little time only; the transport awaits us at Southampton; we are all in readiness, and the order to march may come at any hour. This is the last time we may see each other," he said, in a suddenly somewhat broken voice; "and perhaps it is well, Laura—I have seen too much of you—too much for my own peace."

"Captain Dalton," said she, looking him direct in the eyes, "you have tried to woo me. I need not mince words or matters with you, but I have one question to ask."

"Ask it," said he, huskily.

"Are you at liberty to woo any woman honestly, honourably?"

Dalton grew very pale, but he replied, evasively: "I have loved against my will—against my conscience—though your very name should have repressed that love."

"My name!"

"Your name of Laura."

The name left his lips, as she remarked it had done before, in an unwilling manner, as if it were familiar, yet most distasteful.

"Why?" she asked.

"I knew *another* Laura, and she, but let me not think of her at this moment when I feel that I love you with a passion that I have sought in vain to overcome."

"Why?" she asked, impetuously.

"Because there are hopeless obstacles between us."

"I have none," was her somewhat pointed reply.

"But I have," said he, while bead-drops coursed from his temples; and she regarded him curiously through her veil, and said: "Then you should never have addressed me at all in the language of a lover. I had good reason to suspect something of this kind," she continued, in a tone of severity.

"And hence it was that you always spoke so enigmatically to me."

"Perhaps."

"As one who would judge of a man by his past history rather than by his capacity for good in the future, and so judged me harshly."

He stooped from his saddle, and suddenly kissed her gloved hand. As he did so she heard him whisper, as if to himself: "My darling—my darling—without destroying your honour and my own, I can hope for no nearer caress. Pardon me," he added, aloud.

When he raised his head, she saw that his face was deadly pale; but again the smile of triumph glittered in her half-closed hazel eyes as she merely said: "Captain Dalton, you have all the gallantry of a Spaniard, and seem inclined to pass the *rôle* of Platonic affection I accorded to you; but you must pardon me if I mean resolutely to live in my past."

"We cannot—ought not to live for the dead alone," said Dalton.

"It is said that we bury our dead out of our sight, and may try to forget them, otherwise the world would not go on as it does. We may bury our dead—true, but memory remains."

"How she must have loved that fellow Trelawney!" thought Dalton, with jealousy and sorrow.

"May there not be kindred souls that often meet too late?" she asked.

"And you apply this to yourself and me?"

"Yes."

"I always thought that such ideas of kindred thought and passionate enthusiasm occurred only in youth, and were the result of propinquity and daily intercourse."

"How coldly you respond to me!"

"After the mysterious *obstacle* you so openly referred to, what would you have me do or say?" she asked, with a certain hauteur of tone, and then gave one of her merry little laughs.

Dalton could not help thinking that the alternate hauteur and mirth of the handsome widow at his grave, solemn, and earnest love-making were—to say the least of them—exceedingly ill-timed, while her pretty apparent indifference to the strength of the passion that filled his soul, especially when on the eve of his departure to a distant land, piqued and exasperated him.

"Can the woman be a 'free-lance,' though still in society?" he surmised, with pain in his heart, for, "free-lance" or not, he felt that he loved her—yea, madly—as only men at his age often do love a woman. He knew that she was deemed by some what they termed rather a "debatable widow," whom the social police in the vicinity of Aldershot, where she had rather suddenly appeared—police who consist of embittered spinsters, inquisitive matrons with unmarried daughters, whom her dazzling beauty eclipsed, were rather addicted to "tearing to pieces," a process which Mrs. Trelawney treated with profound indifference or disdain. There was a bold, gay *bonhomie* about her that might be no more than a mere delight in the things of this life, a pretty playfulness and recklessness of spirit that passed in a handsome young matron, and which the "social police" resented, adding "that admiration was food and drink to her." "'Free-lance' or not," he thought again; "to see is to admire, to know her is to love her; but she laughs at my passion as if it were that of a love-sick boy."

"Would to God I had never met you!" said he, "for the meeting has ruined a life that, but for you, if not a happy, was at least a contented one."

"Ruined *your* life!" she exclaimed, as if with surprise.

"Yes; and I shall cross your path no more. Our lives are shaped out for us to a great extent, and mine was planned out for me by others. Oh, by what infernal fatality have you, too, the name of Laura?"

"It was, I suppose, given me by my godfathers and godmothers. You seem to be familiar with it," she added, with one of her merriest laughs.

Dalton knew that a lover laughed at has a lost cause; he knew too—fatally for his own peace—that the love he had for weeks upon weeks past been striving to stifle in his breast, was a love that he had no right to offer; but her reception of it stung him deeply, and in reply to her laughter, he said, gravely and steadily: "Then I am to understand that you have been amusing yourself with me—simply flirting to keep your hand in, Mrs. Trelawney?" he asked, in a voice that was intensely low and clear.

"Precisely so," she said, with a nod and a saucy smile; "playing the game that always requires two to play it."

"What game?"

"Love-making."

"Cruel—cruel! God may forgive you, but I never will!" he exclaimed, and wheeling round his horse, galloped furiously away.

How astonished Dalton would have been could he have seen the change that came over the face and manner of the lady he had just left so abruptly!

Her eyes flashed with joyous triumph, yet they were full of welling tears; her lip quivered; her cheeks were deeply flushed; an agitation beyond her control made her whole form to vibrate; and as she struck her gloved hands together she exclaimed, in a low and fervent voice, with almost a sob in it: "At last—at last I have completely triumphed—have ground him to the dust! At last he loves me, and I have conquered his cold, proud heart!"

Then leaping lightly as a girl from her horse, on reaching her own gate, she passionately embraced and kissed little Netty again and again, greatly to the bewilderment of the child, who had never seen her mother so agitated before.

That night she despatched a note to the camp requesting Captain Dalton to visit her again. All the next day passed, and no answer came.

Her excitement became intense; she sent a messenger to the North Camp to make inquiries, and he returned with the, to her, most startling tidings that the Rifles had marched that morning for embarkation, and that her note was lying undelivered in the empty hut of Captain Dalton, who had left the

lines for Southampton. She had boasted to him laughingly, and with affected pride and bitterness, of the game she had been playing. She had held a trump card in her hand, and now it seemed that she had played and lost it. "I have gone too far, too far, and now may lose him altogether, and after all—after all!" she exclaimed with genuine dismay.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THE ROUTE!"

It was so; those comfortless wooden wigwams in the lines of the North Camp, which had known the Rifles for so many months, now, in the words of the Book of Job, knew them no more; and nothing of the smart but sombre battalion now remained there save a few soldiers—recruits whose training was not complete, or men whose time of service was nearly expired.

The mess had been broken up, its massive and trophied service of plate packed up and placed in the charge of Goring, who had command of the fragment of the battalion left behind. The senior captain of a regiment was never employed on this duty, as, for obvious reasons, his presence at headquarters is always desirable.

On the eventful morning of their march from camp the gallant battalion of the "Prince Consort's Own" scarcely knew themselves in their new "Ashanti togger," as they called it, which was furnished from the stores at Pimlico, and consisted, for each man of a grey tweed tunic, resembling a shooting-jacket, suitable for the climate, with ample pockets; belt and trousers of the same material, and rough canvas leggings; the head-dress, a light-gray Indian helmet, perhaps the first time such a thing had been worn on British ground.

Soldier-like looked the Rifles in their black belts and their heavy marching order, with knapsacks, haversacks, great-coats, canteens and water-bottles.

If there was little of the pomp and circumstance of war in this costume, by repetition in numbers and by uniformity in the mass it did not seem unimposing; and if splendour was wanting, certainly enthusiasm was not, and loud and hearty were the cheers that rang along the lines from one street of huts to another, as the gray column, preceded by the bands of several corps, began its short march to the railway which was to convey it to Southampton just as the red sun of November,

the pioneer of winter, shone out through clouds that had a ragged and dreary look in a gray and gloomy sky.

The moorlands around Aldershot were odorous with withered bracken, and a stray heron might have been seen, perhaps, at Fleet Pond, motionless amid the water as if sculptured in bronze; in the adjacent thickets the woodman was going forth, armed with axe and bill-hook, his dog close behind him, heedless of war and its accompaniments, pausing, perhaps as he heard in the distance on the ambient air the crash of the brass bands that led the Rifles on the first part of the long route to terrible Ashanti, or it might be the chorus of hundreds of manly voices shouting "Cheer, boys, cheer," on the wind of the early morning, but he was thinking only of the bundles of faggots on his shoulder, the crackling fire, the clean-swept hearth, the kettle on the hob, and the trim little wife that awaited him at home.

Bevil Goring was accompanying the battalion to Southampton to see the last of his friends, and to "kill," as he thought, "another day of suspense," the long and empty days of waiting with gloomy forebodings. It seemed to him that a few hours had wrought a curious change in both Jerry Wilmot and Tony Dalton, but more especially in the latter, who from being a grave, earnest, and pleasant fellow, had suddenly become morose, preoccupied, and even sullen and most impatient; one thing alone seemed to gratify him—the sudden and speedy departure to the seat of war.

"What has come to you, my dear fellow?" asked Goring more than once; "you look as if you were going into a fever."

"I am in a fever of the mind, Goring," replied Dalton, "and I may tell you all about it before the transport sails."

Among the crowd that assembled to see the battalion depart were many ladies on horseback. There was one under whose tightly-tied veil the hot tears were falling, as she saw Jerry march past in the strange Ashanti uniform at the head of his company; but Jerry—his sad thoughts turned inwards—saw not her, and he had no prevision that she of whom his heart was so full at that moment—Bella Chevenix—was so near him.

"Time will test his truth," thought the girl; "true love does not die, but the false only, as it depends upon outward influences. Yet *time* may see this regiment return, and Jerry not with it—oh, God, if it should be—not with it!"

And the crash of the brass bands went on, and the tramp of the steadily marching column, the flash of accoutrements and

arms, the cheers, the chorusing, the general hubbub, all portions of a terrible phantasmagoria, amid which he was taken away from her.

Southampton was reached in due time, and by sound of bugle the battalion was "detrained," to use the term now in use, and marched to the steam transport which lay in those busy and stately docks, where of old the sea had ebbed and flowed upon a silent and sandy shore, and where, it is difficult now to believe, Canute the Dane sat in a chair, and took his part in that well-known incident by which he rebuked the flattery of his courtiers.

By a hand gangway the gray column defiled at once on board the ship, whose capacious womb received it. The men were speedily divided into their watches; a guard was detailed; berths were apportioned; arms racked; knapsacks hung on pegs or cleats; bedding inspected; duck shirts and fatigue trousers served out; and so, for a time, the officers and sergeants had a busy time of it; while a thousand mysterious returns, receipts, and requisitions seemed to require the signature of the colonel and everyone else, and these were affixed on the capstan head, the gunwale, the back of the nearest soldier, or anything else that might be improvised as a table.

Incessant was the clatter of the donkey-engines as stores were taken on board, baggage, shot, shell, Gatling guns, waggons, provisions, wheelbarrows, shovels, and pickaxes in bundles. Night fell, and still the odious hurly-burly on deck and by the gaping hatchways went on, to the sound of many a merry chorus or song at times:

It's no matter what you *do*,
If your heart be only *true*.
And his heart *was* true to his Poll.

Though our soldiers are generally too young to have wives now-a-days, in these short-service times, a few years ago it was not so; thus several women of the Rifle Battalion, some with babies in their arms, had followed it to Southampton to see the last of those they might never look upon again.

"Good-bye, my poor Mary," Goring heard a young soldier cry, looking wistfully to his girl-wife, who stood weeping on the quay, where she held up their baby from time to time. "How are you to get back to camp?"

"Never mind, Tom darling; I'm here, anyhow."

"Have you any money?"

"No."

"God help you, darling!" he replied, and proceeded in a mechanical but hopeless way to investigate his pockets.

"I'll take her back, and all the women of ours who are here. Pass the message along, lads," cried Bevil Goring, who now gave a sergeant *carte blanche* to distribute money among all for what they required, and directing them all to meet him at the railway station next morning.

"Three cheers for Captain Goring!" was now the cry, and many men crowded gratefully forward to salute him and shake his hand, while he felt now that he could spend some of the rupees of Bevil Goring of Chowringee to good purpose; and sure enough he met his strange detachment at the station next morning; and after giving them a hearty breakfast, including buns and cans of milk galore for the little ones, he brought them all into camp, while the transport was steaming down the waters of the Solent, and heading for the Channel.

But in this part of our narrative we are anticipating certain events which occurred at Southampton, and which Dalton and Goring, but more particularly the former, were destined to have long in their memory.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SECRET OF DALTON'S LIFE.

"I CANNOT understand the terms on which you say you and Mrs. Trelawney have parted," said Goring, to whom his most valued friend Dalton had been, as a sort of relief to his own mind, apparently making what he called "a clean breast of it," and detailing his relations with the fair widow of Chilcote Grange. "You seem to have made love enough to her—that I saw for myself often. You seemed to have expressed admiration enough for her, to all of which she appears to have listened with patience and pleasure in some instances, with impatience and petulance in others; and yet you seem to have wound up with a kind of quarrel at last!"

"She acknowledged that she had only been amusing herself and befooling me."

"It would also seem, by your own account, that amid all the

curious love-making you never made her a direct proposal of marriage."

"No."

"Why?"

"I dared not," said Dalton, sadly.

"You dared not—and why?"

"Because—because I am a married man—there now, the murder is out!"

"A married man—you, Tony Dalton!" exclaimed Goring, in utter bewilderment.

"I, Tony Dalton—the biggest fool in Her Majesty's service," replied that personage with a groan.

"Does Mrs. Trelawney know of this state of affairs?" asked Goring, after a long pause.

"I have more than once feared as much."

"She hinted to me once that there was a secret in your life that precluded her reception of your addresses. Then it is so?"

"Yes, that I am a married man," replied Dalton, as he threw open his dark green and silk-braided patrol jacket (which he had resumed after the march) as if its collar choked him, tossed his half-finished cigar into the blazing fire, and drained his glass only to replenish it again.

It was in a hotel at Southampton, not far from where the transport lay, when they were having a "farewell drink" after a cutlet or so, that Dalton made this astounding revelation to his friend—one that seemed fully to account for many peculiarities which the latter had remarked in Dalton's intercourse with Mrs. Trelawney.

"Why, in the name of all that is wonderful, have you concealed this so long?"

"An emotion of shame perhaps—shame at my own egregious folly tied my tongue."

"But when, where, how did it all come about?"

"The most miserable stories are often told in a few words, and thus told best; and, Goring, I shall tell you mine," replied Dalton.

"When I was being educated for the service—my parents being dead—I was boarded by my uncle, Sir John Dalton—on whose hands and generosity I was utterly cast—with a tutor at Hastings.

"My uncle was most generous. I had quarterly as much pocket-money—too much indeed—as a young fellow in his early

teens could desire to have ; I had a horse at my command, a pleasure-boat whenever I liked it, and was a frequent attender at the theatre ; for my tutor was a careless fellow, fond of amusement too, and did not look sufficiently after me.

"All this was some ten or twelve years ago. At the theatre there was a young girl who figured in the bills as Miss Laura Dorillion, and who was deemed quite a star.

"One story went that she was a lady of high family, who, in a rage for histrionic fame, had fled from home, changed her name, and adopted the stage as a profession ; another story was that she was the only daughter of a man of rank, whom dissipation or bad speculations on the turf had ruined ; and rumour added that, when only twelve years of age, she had played Juliet to perfection in amateur theatricals at a fashionable West End school ; at fifteen she was a genius ; at seventeen she was cast as Miss Hardcastle in 'She Stoops to Conquer,' and more than once when I saw her as Juliet I longed, with all my soul, to be her Romeo.

"Boylike I fell madly in love with her—in love as dreamy boys at my then years are wont to do—and nightly I haunted the theatre, often in defiance of my tutor, and my studies became a farce ; in fact they were utterly neglected, and I had but one thought—Laura Dorillion ! How pretty—how sweetly pretty—the name sounded to me, and I was never weary of repeating it to myself.

"*Was* she pretty, you will ask ? When made-up for the stage and surrounded by all its accessories, she looked downright lovely ; but, when watching her going from her lodgings to morning rehearsal, I was obliged to confess to myself that my goddess had rather a large mouth, but fine eyes with a sleepy or dreamy expression, long lashes and drooping lids of which she could make a most seductive use ; that in figure she was tall but not ungraceful, and was neither fully grown nor developed ; but there seemed a great want of finish about her for one who was alleged to be the daughter of a noble family. This might proceed, I thought, from the style of her toilette, which certainly did not come from Swan & Edgar's.

"The girl was quite a favourite in Hastings ; she played for, sang for, and subscribed to many local charities, and had about her none of that fastness of dress or demeanour peculiar to so many young girls on the stage ; and so I loved her, or thought I did. I was but a boy—it was what the French—so happy in

their phrases,—call *un grand caprice enflammé par des obstacles*—nothing more, perhaps ; and the obstacles were my lack of independent means to take her off the stage ; my having no profession ; and my uncle's well-known family pride, position, and general views regarding me, his brother's only son, and all that sort of thing. Otherwise I might have continued “to sigh like a furnace,” and eventually, when I went elsewhere, forget her ; but it was not to be.

“I was not a bad-looking fellow, and always dressed scrupulously well ; thus she was not long in discovering me as I sat night after night, bouquet in hand, in a certain pit stall ; and she no doubt connected me with the beautiful bouquets that came to the stage door nightly, in more than one instance with little complimentary notes on pink and perfumed paper inserted therein. Once she appeared at the wings with one of these notes in her hand. She blew me a kiss from the tips of her fingers, and placed the missive in her bosom, two little actions which raised me to the seventh heaven of ecstasy. After that, Laura Dorillion sang to me, acted to me, glanced and smiled at me in a way that completed her conquest, and, in short, I was a lost Tony Dalton !

“As a pledge of solemn engagement I gave her a diamond and opal ring.

“In the end I achieved an introduction in the most matter-of-fact way in the world—just as Sir Walter Scott did to his first love—by the prosaic offer of my umbrella on a wet day, and then my dream began to take a more tangible form in little lunches and solid presents, in escorting her to and from the theatre which became an established kind of expected duty ; in walks on the Sunday mornings along the towering cliffs that overhang the sea ; along the breezy Marina by the Lover's Seat in lonely Fairlight Glen with its thickly-wooded sides and tapestry of wild flowers ; by the Dripping Well, that an enormous beech-tree overhangs ; among the ruins of the old castle, when “the old, old tale” was told again—not of Hasting and his men, or of Saxon and Normans—but of our love for each other, and life became to me a species of feverish intoxication for some weeks at least.

“Some little points of manner, accent, pronunciation certainly did at times jar upon my better taste ; and she seemed, for a girl educated at a West End seminary for young ladies, rather ignorant of the manners and customs of that “society”

which she affected in genteel comedy to portray upon the stage ; but the former I attributed to association with her inferiors—to wit, the members of the company to which she belonged.

"From what you know of my disposition and general character, you may guess the end of all this."

"No—I do not," said Goring.

"I married her."

"Whew !" whistled Goring ; "in church ?"

"In church ! where she was given away by the manager. The 'heavy old woman' acted as mother, two young ladies of the company were bridesmaids, and when, tremulously she subscribed herself in the register Laura Dorillion, the clerk and the pew-opener gave their signatures as witnesses. The breakfast is but a confused memory. There was no rice—no old slippers ; and we are told that no girl likes to be married without any of the gay things which make marriage such a joyous experience—no gay preparations—no pretty wedding in a flower-decked church—not even a new dress."

"Well ?"

"Then came a life of misery and jealousy. I trembled when other men went near her, and boiled with exasperation when love was openly made to her on the stage in the mere business of the play. I had seen enough of that done before with considerable placidity, but somehow I could not stand it now.

"With my last quarter's allowance in my pocket, and utterly vague ideas of the future in my mind, I left the house of my tutor and went to share her humble lodging in a rather obscure part of Hastings, and soon the sordid nature of our surroundings began to impress me most disagreeably, as the bubble began to burst.

"At last there came a night which I was fated not to forget for a time. I had brought her home from the theatre, where she had acquitted herself with singular skill and sweetness as blind Iolanthe in 'King René's Daughter,' and she was in the act of repeating a portion of her dialogue with Tristan as we ascended the stair—

"Another time,
When I had pined for many tedious days,
Because my father was detained from home,
I wept for very gladness when he came !
Through tears I gave my bursting heart relief,
And at mine eyes it found a rushing vent.

"In our little sitting-room I found an elderly man, wearing a battered grey hat girt by a black band, and clad in shabby genteel—nay, quite threadbare garments—standing on the hearthrug, smoking a short clay pipe, with his coat-tails over his arms, his bleared and tipsy-looking eyes—one of which had a white plaister over it—regarding the furniture and details of the apartment critically, while he took a sip from a pewter mug of beer, and set it down with a clank.

"'Hullo, my girl,' he exclaimed; 'here you are at last! This here is a rum go. So this is the young gent as you have gone and made such a fool of yourself by marrying?'

"Laura's heart was beating fast—so fast that even respiration seemed to suffocate her; her face was blanched; her eyes had a scared expression; and gave me a glance that seemed full of shame and agony.

"'Who is this impertinent scoundrel?' I demanded.

"'Scoundrel in your teeth again!' he exclaimed, turning up the cuffs of his coat threateningly, and striking his battered hat firmly on his head. 'Is this your company manners, you young cub?' he added, with a frightful imprecation.

"'Who are you, and what do you want here?' I demanded, looking about for a stick.

"'Dabchick is my name! Jo Dabchick, clown, Banger's Circus, Surrey side o' the river, and no mistake; and I have come here to see my own daughter, Laura Dorillion, as she calls herself, or must it be Mrs. Antony Dalton now—Lady Dalton perhaps that's to be, when your uncle hops his blessed twig?'

"'Oh, father,' said Laura, in a breathless voice, 'why have you come, and how did you find me out?'

"'I come because I want money; and, as for finding you out, that was easy enough; the Hastings theatre ain't at the bottom of the sea.'

"'And mother?'

"'Is there in your bed—has had a drop too much, and so I have tucked her in there; and now what have you got for supper—tripe, sausages, bloaters, or summat tasty, I hope? Speak—you look as lively as a couple of glow-worms in the sunshine!'

"My soul sickened within me! And with these additions to our little household—a slatternly, odious mother, a beery, broken-down actor, whose line had once been genteel comedy, a clown in a circus latterly, but whose incessant dissipation had

deprived him of all employment—life became a burden now, and my stupendous folly stood in letters of fire before me.

“Existence became unendurable, and neither Laura nor I dared to look forward to the dark and vague future we might be doomed to drag out in the world.

“Their arrival filled my wife with shame and anger, and I do believe with generous sorrow for me. My quarter’s pittance was soon expended; *her* salary could not maintain us all. My tutor soon discovered the whole situation, and laid it mercilessly bare before my uncle, Sir John Dalton, who from that hour cast me off, ignored my letters and my existence, and disinherited me by his will.

“I had no money, or means of getting any, after the best of my jewellery and wardrobe had departed. Laura’s father and mother soon proved abusive and most obnoxious to me; they insulted me hourly, and eventually drove me from the squalid lodgings we shared together. Laura one night took their part; it required but that to fill up the measure of my disgust, and I found myself wandering in the streets with all I possessed in the world—the clothes that I wore. I rooted the love of her out of my heart; but it was long before I could efface her image, which often a fancied resemblance in another brought before me.

“There are some men of whom it is said that they will not acknowledge their false steps even to their own hearts; but I am not one of them, and must acknowledge, dear Goring, that in sackcloth and ashes I have repented of mine.

“My haughty uncle proving obdurate to the last degree, there was no hope for me so far as he was concerned; so I took the Queen’s shilling and sailed for India, and there I strove to forget my boyish folly, the contemptible position I had occupied with such a father and mother-in-law, the disgust and horror with which their advent and their surrounding inspired me—sick, took, of the slatternly girl I had married, for slatternly she too was in her home and when off the stage, reserving all her toilettes and her graces for the British public.

“You know the rest. I soon got a commission through the ranks—sooner than I could have got it through the medium of a crammer and exams. From the hour I turned at midnight along the Marina of Hastings, and heard the monotonous sound of the surge, as it rolled on the beach in the dark, I have never heard of my wife or been able to trace her. Her odious parents

I discovered have been long since dead, and that she is no longer on the stage, or, if so, bears another name, or has gone I know not where.

"I have sometimes hoped that I had been freed from her by death—ungenerous though that hope may be, and that my uncle must have heard of her demise, when by a codicil to his will he left me all his fortune. And now you know why it was that I dared not make a proposal to Mrs. Trelawney—nor did I ever think of love or marriage till I met her lately; and how I love her, and have struggled to tear that hopeless passion from my heart, is known only to God and to myself!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

"POOR Dalton! you have indeed suffered deeply—paid dear for your boyish folly," said Goring, as the former concluded the little story of his early life in a voice tremulous with emotion. "Now the apparent inconsistency of your attention to Mrs. Trelawney is quite accounted for."

"Until I knew myself free to ask her to be my wife I had sworn in my inner heart that I would not do so—indeed, I dared not do so; yet, for the life of me, attracted as I was, I could not help hovering about her; but now I am going to Ashanti, and there is an end of it! Such was the end of the fatal passion of a foolish lad. Since those days I have never entered a theatre, and shudder at the mere idea of a dramatic situation."

"You are in one now," said a sweet and tremulous voice, as Mrs. Trelawney, who, unseen and unheard by them in their pre-occupation, had softly entered the room, stood before them.

How much or how little she had overheard they did not precisely know, but with a smile of mingled sadness and sweetness, pride and triumph, she threw up her veil, and the full light of the gasolier overhead fell upon her rich, shining hair, her beautiful and animated countenance.

"Mrs. Trelawney!" exclaimed the friends together, as they started from their chairs.

"You here—in Southampton!" added Dalton, in a voice tremulous with bewilderment.

"Yes. Can it be that you have yet to learn that I am that Laura Dorillion to whom you gave this opal and diamond ring, with whom you spent so many a sweet hour by Fairlight Glen, the East Cliffs that overhang the sea, by the Dripping Well, and amid the old castle walls at Hastings—the Laura whom you married, and from whom you so coldly fled?"

Dalton tried to speak, but his voice was gone; he could but stretch his hand towards her, without advancing, while regarding her with growing bewilderment; so she spoke again, with tears in her voice: "You ought to have forgiven me the humility of my origin, for that I could not help—ay, forgiven me long ago, Antony. Remember that 'he who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself,' for 'every man hath need of forgiveness,' we are told.

"My wife—you?" exclaimed Dalton.

"Laura—your own wife, whom you married in St. Clement's Church on the 10th of August. You remember the day?"

The words were simple, but spoken with great pathos, and all her sparkling manner seemed to have left her as she seated herself, and he hung over her.

"Do you forgive me, Laura, and pardon me—pardon me, and love me?"

"You know that I love you."

He was about to put an arm round her, when he paused and said: "But whence this name of Trelawney?"

"I assumed it from an aunt, who left me a small fortune, but for which I—I might have been compelled to struggle in penury on the stage to support your daughter."

"My daughter!" exclaimed Dalton, a great love for the beautiful little girl he knew suddenly gushing up in his heart. "My daughter—mine?"

"Our child," said Laura, softly.

"Born—when?"

"Six months after you left me at Hastings."

"But her name—of Antoinette?"

"Is but the feminine of your own—Antony."

"Oh, what a blind fool I have been—Laura—Laura!"

Goring, who had been studying a picture on the wall, now thought he might as well withdraw softly, and smoke his cigar outside.

Taller in stature, fuller in figure, more fully developed in every way, and with a bearing, manner, and grace cultivated by

those among whom she had moved, it required a certain effort to recognise in her the girlish Laura Dorillion of the past time. Though her whole style was different—finer and more statuesque—and the mode of her toilette and of dressing her hair was different, her voice and the inflexions of it, her expression of eye, the droop of the lid and flicker of the long lash, and the sweet smile were, he now saw, all unchanged, and he pressed her to his breast in the rapture of the moment, forgetting that the transport which was soon to bear him away was at that supreme moment of joy having her fires banked up preparatory to putting to sea.

“And you love me, Laura?” he never was tired of repeating, and hearing the sweet admission that she did so. “Oh, why have you concealed all this—why have you concealed yourself thus, and from me?”

“I wished to try you—to test you—to compel you to love me, and I have done so, have I not?” she asked, taking his face between her hands and gazing tenderly into his eyes.

“You know now what fettered my tongue,” said he, with a sigh.

“I knew you were in bondage—but it was in bondage to *me*. Your love for me was an insult to myself; your compliments and intentions in the present time were an implied insult to my past. You dared to love me, knowing that you had a wife somewhere—where, you knew not; but you little thought that Mrs. Trelawney, the supposed widow of a mythical Trelawney, and Laura Dorillion were one and the same person. Now, is the situation dramatic? Do you remember that you told me that you loved me against your own will and conscience, and that my very *name* of Laura repressed that love at times? Heavens, could you but know what I felt—how my heart was wrung—my woman’s pride alternately roused and crushed by admissions such as these! I have suffered greatly, darling, but all is over now,” she added, laying her cheek on his breast, while his lips were pressed to her forehead.

After a time, she spoke again: “I knew not that you were in the army, or were in life. I knew not of your existence till I met you suddenly at Aldershot, after I had lived years of seclusion in the Channel Isles. I thanked God for the discovery; I vowed to win you again, if I could, before I would reveal myself—and I have done so.”

She whose love he had so longed and prayed for, and yet striven to root out of his heart, was now his own—his own

after all ; and all the pent-up love of lonely years had found reward at last.

"Often before I met you again—discovered you, and vowed to make you mine again, I had pondered that, but for Netty's sake, whether taking it all in all, the good with the bad, life was worth living," said she, her eyes full of tears now.

"And till now, Laura, my life has seemed a gloomy and empty one. I was often appalled by the aimlessness and isolation of it."

"How strange it is that you have never discovered me!" said Laura ; "yet I have seen your eyes wander more than once to this engagement ring."

"And stranger still that when I heard you sing the old, old song that was once so familiar, making my heart thrill with troubled memories, no light came to me. Oh, Laura, you acted well your part to this joyous ending."

"I told you that I had found the verses in an old album, where a friend wrote them years ago ; that friend was yourself. You remember so lately telling me that I had ruined your life?"

"Yes, Laura, and your cruel smile."

"God knows how at that moment I longed to cast myself on your breast, Antony, as I do now, and barter all my past wrongs for a single kiss !"

His Christian name again on her lips, as in the days of their boy-and-girl love, ere the black change came, and how strange, yet familiar—how sweet, how dear it sounded !

"How did you learn I was here with Goring ?" he asked, tenderly.

"I learned it at the transport."

"My darling—my darling, why have you kept all this secret so long—the secret that you were my own ?"

"As I told you, I would never be more to you *than I am now*, were I to live a hundred years, and was I not right ?"

"But to keep the secret so long—I might never have learned it, for to-morrow will see us separated. Hastings was the first volume of our romance."

"Southampton was the second."

"The third is Ashanti. How it will end, God alone knows, darling," he added, straining her in his embrace, while her tears fell fast now ; "if spared to return to you, Laura—to you and little Nelly—you will never regret your love and trust in me at last—your confidence in my affection."

Poor Dalton—"if spared;" he was right to say that, with the fate and fortune of a barbarous war before him.

The old love had become the new one, and the new love was the old; and yet it seemed that to-night both had entered on a new relationship.

And, as we have said, the two last appeals of Jerry Wilmot and Dalton ended differently. Practically they came to the same conclusion—a separation from those they loved.

Laura now deplored deeply her pride and folly, as she deemed it, in playing the game she had done so long; but the separation had to be faced and endured; yet she watched the transport, as it steamed down Southampton Water, till it melted into the haze; and it was not until then that she fully realised that her husband, so lately restored to her, was gone again, and perhaps for ever.

But that her appearance on board would have excited speculation in the battalion, she would have gone down the Channel with the steamer and come ashore in the pilot's boat.

On the long, though rapid voyage, Dalton had ample food for reflection, for thinking of the strangeness of his fate, that for months past he had been associating with, meeting and seeing at intervals, and loving deeply, a woman who was his own wife, and yet he knew it not!

Why had she played this perilous game so long?

Why, but for the temptation to win him again, and for the gratification of a kind of affectionate vengeance. And now they were separated, each with but a memory to the other again.

A few photos and two locks of hair—the light blond hair of his wife, a golden curl of his little daughter—were all that poor Dalton took with him to the burning coast of Ashanti, to remind him of the happiness he had so lately and so briefly tasted, and might never taste more.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEVIL GORING'S RESOLUTION.

IN his bitter anxiety Bevil Goring condescended again to apply to Mr. Solomon Slagg as to the movements of Lord Cadbury; but ignorant perhaps of the peer's actual whereabouts, and

that the applicant was now the possessor of twenty thousand per annum, he never vouchsafed the slightest reply.

Alison had promised to wait for him a year—and well he knew that, if left to herself, she would have waited for several. Would she be true to that promise? Could he but find her now, he would have no compunction in carrying her off, whatever her father might say, though it would seem that the brave old Scottish days of Lochinvar and Jock of Hazeldean are over and for ever.

The corps was gone now, and he felt dull and lonely in the depôt, which would probably soon be taken from the camp to Chatham or elsewhere, and the little duty he had of it consisted chiefly of drilling and training green hands, and taking them through a weary course of musketry, while his thoughts were elsewhere, and he soon began to feel that, if he did not soon learn tidings of Alison, he would “leave no stone unturned” to get away from Aldershot—to get away to fight the Ashantees or any other folks; and the next moment he would be thankful that he was left behind to search for her.

To search for her—but where? Ay, where? He was soon to receive a terrible rouser!

One day he visited Mrs. Trelawney to inform her that the transport with Dalton and the regiment on board had been spoken with by a vessel some sixty miles westward of Ushant, when he found her in the act of writing a note to himself, and looking somewhat nervous and disturbed in manner.

She received him with unusual kindness, and with a kind of sympathy in her manner that puzzled him. After a little pause, while eying him closely, she said: “You have seen this morning’s paper, I presume?”

“Yes,” said he, and his heart seemed to flutter, as it was evident that she had seen something therein that he had not.

“Did you not see the announcement of——?”

“Of what?” he asked, impetuously, as Mrs. Trelawney paused, her lips apparently unable to tell to what she referred, and with tremulous hands she took up a morning paper and searched for a particular paragraph or passage, while Goring felt his heart sickening, as he never doubted it referred to the marriage of Alison, who, he feared, had yielded to her father’s iron influence at last.

“Read this—but nerve yourself first, my dear friend,” said Mrs. Trelawney, in her sweet low voice.

"It is confidently asserted that the English yacht reported as having been sunk some weeks ago in a midnight collision with the lugger *Le Chien Noir*, of Ostend, off the mouth of the Maese, is Lord Cadbury's beautiful brigantine the *Firefly*, so well known at the Cowes Regattas. Sir Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont and suite were on board."

He grew deadly pale and reeled, but recovering, read the fatal paragraph again and again, till the letters seemed photographed on his brain, and he was scarcely conscious. Mrs. Dalton, as we must call her now, was in tears, and had taken his left hand caressingly between her own.

"Shocked as I am by this news, which I trust in heaven may be untrue, I am shocked," said she, "to be first to break it to you; but you must have learned it in time, and perhaps even more abruptly, and from those less able to sympathise with you."

He covered his eyes and did not speak.

"You observed," said Laura, "that the writer says it is *reported*—which leaves room for hope—and we were told that the yacht had gone to the Mediterranean."

"Which I began to suspect was a ruse, and this awful intelligence seems to prove that I was right," said Goring, in a very broken voice. "My poor Alison—my poor Alison!"

He threw himself into a chair, and a silence for some minutes ensued.

Separation and opposition were to be looked forward to, and had been encountered and effected. Even a marriage with Lord Cadbury was not improbable; had not his own heart told him so but a few minutes before? But a catastrophe like this—death—death by drowning—was altogether unlooked for!

Sad and broken was the conversation now between him and Laura Dalton, and they could but surmise and conjecture in vain, while he lingered long with her, as he clung to her presence and society for sympathy.

Drowned—gone—out of the world—away from him, and for ever! It seemed incredible, unrealisable!

He recalled more powerfully than ever now her loving words, her tender and winning expression of eye; again he felt in memory the pressure of her soft little hands, her gentle kisses, and the sea seemed to give up its dead at the only exorcism it will obey—that of a bereaved and faithful heart—

and his beloved was with him as on that last time he saw her face.

"Drowned—lost!" he struck his hands together, and often passed one across his eyes, as if to clear away a mist before him.

And he thought—he could think of nothing else—of her delicate and beloved form being the sport of the cold, dark waves—it might be the prey of the dwellers therein—that awful grave, without turf or flowers, which no sunshine would ever brighten to his eyes—the cruel sea that had taken her from him for ever!

Times there were when but for this feature in his loss he might have thanked Heaven that it was death—only death—that separated him from his darling, and not a degrading marriage with that odious old man. And in the extremity of his grief he at times forgot to feel anger at either him or her father for the catastrophe they were the unintentional means of bringing about. But anger and rage too were coming soon.

When Goring was sitting like a man turned to stone, evincing little sign of life save when he sighed heavily, Laura Dalton kindly laid a hand on his shoulder and said: "The depôt is fully formed and in working order now. Leave the command of it to the next officer, young Fleming, and, as you will not be wanted at Aldershot till the spring drills commence, go personally and search for intelligence."

"Search—where—at the bottom of the sea?" said Goring, huskily.

"The yacht is said to have been sunk off the Maese; people at Maeseland-Sluis or Rotterdam may know something about it. Get leave, go there and inquire: you will be useless here, my dear Goring, and a burden to yourself."

"Right, I thank you," he exclaimed, starting up; "it is a good suggestion."

"Is not anything better than sitting still a prey to wretchedness and one's miserable thoughts?" she said, feelingly, as she referred, perhaps, to some time or passages in her own past life.

Goring resolved to take measures for trying his too probably useless and hopeless search at once. He promised faithfully to write to Laura Dalton informing her of his progress, and of every fragment of intelligence that he could pick up—telegraphing to her in the first place. He pressed her hand, kissed her on the forehead, and in another minute was in his saddle,

and galloping back to Aldershot at a break-neck speed—at a rate which would certainly have made his nag remonstrate had it possessed the gift of speech.

He had wealth enough certainly to satisfy all the requirements—the wishes of Sir Ranald Cheyne ; but what did it avail him now ? It would neither restore the dead nor his own peace of mind. And now he could but do, as he had done a hundred times before, softly open the clasp of her engagement ring—her brother Ellon's ring—and gaze upon her features, and the tiny lock of hair, while his heart was wrung within him.

He dashed off his application for leave, and had it at once despatched. He commanded the inlying piquet that night, and, like an automaton, had to go through the formula of parading it in line with forage caps, great-coats, and side-arms, and seeing the camp patrolled between retreat and half-an-hour after the first post of tattoo.

Never would he forget the gloom of that few hours' duty, which seemed to be done, not by himself, but someone else. He had a curious and perplexing sense of a dual existence.

Would leave be refused him ? That was not to be thought of. He could not rest in his hut alone. Nearly all that night he wandered about the silent camp like an evil or unquiet spirit, challenged again and again by great-coated sentinels who marvelled whether this officer who passed their posts so often, and to all appearance so aimlessly, was demented or not ; and so, for hours and hours of a gloomy and inclement night, he roved about, and heard the wind swaying the tops of the trees. He shivered, and tried to collect his thoughts, but seemed to have none to collect. He tried to reason with himself, but, whatever idea suggested itself, one was always uppermost—Alison drowned, Alison in the cruel and merciless sea.

“ I must get out of this place, do something, pull myself together, or I shall go mad,” he muttered.

Was he dreaming ? Was all this sorrow a vision of the night that would pass away ?

Till the morning gun boomed from Gun Hill, and the sweet low *réveille* began to steal out on the moistened air, he continued to wander thus, till, drenched with the dews of night, he retired to his hut, and flinging himself upon his bed, endeavoured to sleep for an hour or two—the sleep of utter exhaustion. From this happy state he was soon roused by an uproarious rattling

at the door of his room, and his subaltern, Frank Fleming in undress uniform—a heedless, noisy young fellow, and a second edition of Jerry Wilmot, but neither revised nor corrected—came bustling in, shouting: “The black ball is hoisted *alone* at headquarters. Thank God!”

“What do you mean?” asked Goring in a weak voice, but angrily.

“Mean, man alive! don’t you know? It means that the parade is cancelled.”

“I had forgotten, but, till I dismiss the piquet, parades are nothing to me,” said Goring, turning his face to the wall, and Fleming departed, fully believing from the manner and appearance of his senior officer that “he was screwed tight as a drum, by Jove!—on duty, too! I wonder the fellow doesn’t cut Aldershot now—he’s rich enough; can draw cheques galore; not get them, like me, with strong paternal comments, and perhaps well-deserved objurgations.”

And Bevil Goring lay there in his hut, hearing the incessant drums beating and bugles sounding with a dazed feeling, as if he had been shot into another world. With him it was—

Oh, love for a year, a month, a day,

But alas for the love that loves away!

“What the devil is up with Goring?” said Fleming and others of the *dépôt*; “within the last few days he has looked older by ten years—worn and worried—not at all like a man who has just come into a fine pot of money.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JOURNEY.

At last he got his leave of absence and was off for London. Food remained before him almost untasted or forgotten. He ate eventually, but very sparingly, like one who knows it should be partaken of only for strength to achieve some task that was to come.

“We no longer travel,” wrote Thackeray, with reference to some of the improvements of the age; “we are carried from place to place,” and Goring was sensible of what another writer calls “the tedious hurry of locomotion,” as he was swept on his way to Harwich by the 7 p.m. train from the great bustling and brilliantly lighted station at Liverpool Street.

There are few among us who have not undergone at some period of our lives that intolerable fever of spirit, when setting out on some journey or errand, the eventuality of which may be the life or death of some one loved well and dearly. The heart and soul annihilating space, traverse the journey in an instant ; the helpless, longing body, no matter at how swift a rate it may be progressing, seems to stand stock-still, and the imposed inaction becomes a physical torture that is to a certain extent merciful, since for the time it partially paralyses the action of the brain.

All this, or something like it, was endured by Bevil Goring, while the swift express tidal train sped on its way through the darkness of the night by Witham with its long and almost solitary street ; through Colchester, getting but a glimpse of the winding valley overlooked by its old castle ; by Manningtree, Bradfield, and welcome to his ears was the cry of "Harwich," and he became sensible of the cold sea-breeze as the train went clanking into the station, on the tongue of land between the mouths of the Stour and the Orwell ; and a minute more saw him with his railway-rugs in a strap hurrying after the porter who shouldered his portmanteau.

"What steamer, sir ?" he asked.

"Rotterdam."

"All right, sir—here you are."

A vision of a red funnel amid the uncertain glow of many coloured lights and lanterns, a bustle and the jarring of ropes and chains, with the clank of donkey-engines and goods swung in mid-air from derricks, ascending and descending, much shouting and swearing and hurrying to and fro over slippery decks and piles of luggage covered by wet tarpaulins, a bearded man on the gangway, lantern in hand, viewing the tickets and passing the travellers on board ; and then with a sigh of relief—almost satisfaction—Goring found himself in the cabin of the steamer.

"State room or locker, sir ?" asked the steward, touching his cap.

"A locker—there, that will do," said Goring, as he threw his rugs on one and looked round him. He saw "Rotterdam" on everything, from the front of the steward's cap to the glasses in the trays that swung between the beams, and after a brandy and seltzer he lit a cigar, and went on deck as the screw began to revolve, the shore-warps fell plashing from the timber heads into the water, and way was made upon the vessel.

There were but few passengers on board, and these few, as yet, seemed disposed to be surly, suspicious, and to keep apart from each other in true John Bull fashion.

A bright and beautiful moon shed its silvery light upon the smooth but rippling water, and by half-past nine the clang of the Bell Buoy began to grow fainter and fainter as the steamer headed seaward, and the many red and green lights on the flat shore began to fade out and melt into the uncertain haze.

Long did Bevil Goring remain on deck alone, sunk in deep and sad thoughts. Was *she* indeed beneath those moonlit waves over which he was so swiftly gliding? He shivered as he looked at them, and turned his eyes to the star-studded sky; at last he wearied of the incessant repetitions from the watch to the man at the wheel, "starboard," "port," "hard-a-port," "steady," every ten minutes or so when a vessel came near, and the tiresome iteration of their orders only ceased when the fog-horns began to sound, when the anchor was let go near a long line of lights that twinkled dimly through mist upon the shore to the eastward, and Bevil Goring knew that he was now close in on the Continent.

Midnight was long since past, and he went below; the weary steward was still yawning in his pantry, when Bevil thought another brandy and seltzer would do him no harm.

"How long may we be here?" he asked impatiently.

"Till the fog lifts, sir, or day breaks, certainly."

"Then we may not get to Rotterdam till midday?"

"Rotterdam, did you say, sir?" asked the steward with a stare of surprise.

"Yes."

"Why, sir, this is the Antwerp boat, and these lights on shore are Flushing—we're in the Scheldt."

Goring was exasperated on hearing this—a cause of delay and trouble quite unexpected.

"I was told distinctly that this was the Rotterdam boat."

"So it is, sir, in a way—it is *the* Rotterdam, bound for Antwerp. Where *was* you going to?"

Goring explained, on which the steward mixed himself a glass of grog, laughed, and said it was a jolly mistake. Goring, however, failed to see the jollity of it, and began to consult a railway guide to trace out his route from Antwerp the moment he landed there, by Breda, to the city on the Maese. While thus employed, he asked the steward if he had heard of a collision

some time ago near the mouth of that river, in which an English yacht had suffered.

"Yes, sir," replied the steward, "but it wasn't quite off the mouth of the Maese."

"Where then?"

"More to the south'ard—somewhere off the coast of Walcheren."

"It was Lord Cadbury's yacht."

"Yes, sir, so I heard."

"What happened?" asked Goring, making an effort to control himself and conceal his agitation, which was totally unperceived by the steward, who was collecting from the table all the glasses and decanters left by the passengers, who were now rolled up in rugs, and stowed away in their berths or on lockers.

"One of the craft was sunk."

"Which?"

"Don't know, sir, precisely."

"Were any drowned?"

"Some o' course, sir—a young woman, for one."

"A young lady?" gasped Bevil.

"Can't say, sir—coming, sir!" he added, in reply to a voice that hailed from near the rudder-case; "whisky grogs for two—flash o' lightning and gin cocktail for the two American gents," he added to his assistant; while Goring betook himself to the little cuddy on deck, and sat there with a very benumbed and stunned feeling about him; while once more the vibration of the vessel and the everlasting "Hard-a-port—starboard—steady" announced that the steamer was again under way; that the fog had lifted; and that she was gliding up the waters of the Scheldt, on each side of which not a vestige of the flat shore was visible as yet.

All inclination to sleep had departed from Bevil Goring; yet he was very weary, and a year seemed to have elapsed since he threw off his uniform and donned mufti at Aldershot, and had seen the green and red lights of Harwich Pier fade into the sea.

Trees that seemed to grow amid the water, fringes of low willow-clad banks, distant spires and windmills began to peep up on either hand in the gray light of the morning, and the earlier part of noon was creeping on, when, long before they were near the city of Antwerp, the spire of its glorious cathedral, one of the finest specimens of Gothic architecture in Europe,

the carving of which is like Mechlin lace, and which Charles V said was so delicate in its workmanship that it would require a case to preserve it, seemed to start sheer from the surface of the water—a curious effect produced by the immensity of its height, which, as it towers skywards, dwarfs to toys the really lofty houses that cluster round it.

On past the green sloping glacis and grassy embrasures of the citadel—one of the strongest in Europe—glided the steamer. As she did so, Goring could little foresee a remarkable morning, an episode in his own life, he was to spend on the ramparts of that Belgian fortress. Nearer she drew to the shore, with its quaint houses of the Middle Ages, all crow-stepped gables and curious windows; nearer to the wharves, where lay piles of goods coming from or going to every part of the world; and now, dockmen, porters, hotel-touts, and wharfingers began to rush hurriedly to and fro, while gendarmes in blue, with rifle and sword, smoked their cigarettes, looking placidly on; and Bevil Goring did so as one in a dream.

A few minutes more, while the steam blew off with a roar, and the *Rotterdam* was moored alongside the great Quai Van Dyck. On one side lay the city, with all its vast wet docks; on the other the green, receding Tête de Flandres; between them a river, in size far exceeding the Thames at London; and far in the west the shadowy isles, with which the eye, from the spire, may see that the mouth of the Scheldt is crowded.

Barring all passage shoreward, at the end of the gangway, about which the passengers were crowding impatiently with their travelling-bags and portmanteaus, stood a *douanier*, or custom-house officer, in blue uniform, with the inevitable kepi (worn by every official in Antwerp, from the general commanding the garrison to the milk and buttermilk man), bearded, grim, impassive, and, like all Belgian under-functionaries, disposed to insolence, dilatoriness, and to annoy the traveller, thereby contrasting singularly with the punctuality and politeness of similar officials in France and Austria.

Bevil Goring's baggage, a simple portmanteau, had been opened, examined, passed, and marked with the usual cabalistic figures in white chalk, and the steward, in expectation of a small fee, was re-strapping it, when he suddenly drew Bevil's attention to a remarkably beautiful little vessel, cutter-rigged aft and brig forward, with a breach in her bulwarks, on which a gang of riggers were setting up a new foretopmast and foretopgallant

mast, with their hamper, cross-yards, and so forth. She lay alongside the quay, and just astern of the steamer.

Impatient only to get ashore and drive to the railway for Rotterdam, Bevil was about to hurry up the gangway, when the steward said: "*That's* the yacht as you were asking about, sir."

"Lord Cadbury's—the *Firefly*!"

"Yes."

"Then she was not sunk?"

"Sunk; no, she couldn't have been, for there she lies, as the Flushing pilot has just told me. *She* sunk the lugger off the mouth of the Scheldt, and was towed up here to re-fit. And a regular beauty she is."

Bevil Goring felt his heart leap, and, giddy with many emotions, forced his way rather unceremoniously up the gangway, and, with his portmanteau in one hand and his roll of railway-rugs in the other, leaped from the quay on the deck of the yacht.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SNARE.

A SMART, sailor-like fellow, wearing an Oxford jacket and naval cap, and who seemed to be in authority, as he was overlooking the riggers, who were swaying up and fiddling the topmast, now turned and gave him a glance of inquiry, as much as to say, "Now, who are *you*, and what do you want?"

"This is the *Firefly*, Lord Cadbury's yacht?"

"It is."

"You had an accident at sea—a collision; did anything else happen, were any lives lost?" asked Goring, impetuously and nervously.

"May I ask who is inquiring?" said the other.

"Captain Goring, of the Rifle Brigade."

"Oh, a friend of his lordship's, I presume?"

"No, though I have met him. And you?"

"I am Tom Llanyard, at your service—his lordship's skipper, but in Her Majesty's service, like yourself, once. Lives were lost—some of the Ostend lubbers, who failed to hang out a light."

"Any of the yacht?"

"Only Daisy Prune, Miss Cheyne's maid. Poor little girl, I did my best to save her, but a wave took her out of my grasp."

Human grief is perhaps rather selfish; thus it was rather a relief to Goring when he heard that the poor human life lost was that of "only Daisy Prune."

"Miss Cheyne?"

"Is well, or was well when she left the yacht three weeks ago, but Sir Ranald was seriously injured by a swinging block. Step below, Captain Goring, and have a glass of wine. You look fagged."

"Thanks," replied Captain Goring, who was giddy again with the mere revulsion of feeling, and felt an emotion of great thankfulness that he had so suddenly, so unexpectedly lighted upon the direct track of those he was in search of. Hitherto he had only looked forward to tidings—if any—of death, not life, and it might be of unhappiness.

He stepped into the handsome little saloon of the yacht, which had all the luxury and elegance of a sea-going boudoir.

"Pemmican," cried Llanyard to the steward, "glasses, some dry sherry, and a biscuit; too early for grog, I suppose, sir, as the sun is not over the foreyard. *That* was Miss Cheyne's cabin," he added, indicating a little state-room, the occupation of which by her gave it an interest in his eyes and still more in the eyes of his listener; "yes, sir, her cabin, and may be again, if she sails with us."

"Ah!" replied Goring, thinking it might be unwise to exhibit too much interest; "where is Lord Cadbury just now?"

"They are all at a hotel in Antwerp."

"*All!*"

"Yes—Lord Cadbury, Sir Ranald, and Miss Cheyne."

"What hotel?"

"Don't precisely know—I'm seldom on shore myself, and, when I do, never go beyond the Hôtel d'Angleterre on the quay, as I know neither French nor Flemish, and might get stranded. But Gaskins knows where they are, and he's on board just now."

"Gaskins—who is he?"

"His lordship's groom and valet. Pemmican, pass the word forward for Gaskins—that is, if you want to know."

"I wish to know very much," said Goring, scarcely able to restrain his impatience.

Gaskins appeared, just as we saw him last, looking the perfection of an English groom, with a short, dark-gray surtout buttoned to the throat, spotless white tie and cords, long-bodied and short-legged, a straw in his mouth, a flower at his button-hole, and a sudden twinkle of intense cunning in his half-closed eyes, as he recognised Bevil Goring (whom he had often seen out with the hounds), and at once took in the whole situation. He had not been so long in Lord Cadbury's service as not to know what brought *him* to Antwerp.

"This gentleman wishes to know Lord Cadbury's hotel," said Tom Llanyard.

Gaskins touched his cockaded hat, and affected to think. He paused and scratched his chin.

"Can't you say?" said Goring, impatiently.

"He has changed it, sir, lately; we are now at the—the 'Red Lion' in the 'Roo de Cos,' I think it is called."

"We, meaning also Sir Ranald and Miss Cheyne?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks. And now, Mr. Llanyard, I shall bid you good morning," and, shaking the sailor's hand, Goring went on deck.

"Here are your railway rugs, sir," said Gaskins, following him up thither up the companion-way.

Goring took the handle of the straps in his hand, nodded his thanks, and went on shore; but had he looked back he might have been puzzled to perceive the extraordinary grin that overspread the visage of Mr. Gaskins, and the manner in which that gentleman slapped his thigh and then his mouth, making thereby the loud sound of drawing a cork.

He then whispered something in the ear of a gendarme who was standing on the quay. The latter looked over the voiture, or cab, into which Goring was stepping, and, after eyeing Gaskins keenly, made an entry in his note-book.

The latter then jumped into a tramway 'bus, which he knew passed the hotel patronised by Lord Cadbury, to whom he betook himself in all haste to report matters, and that Captain Goring was in Antwerp!

Was it fate, good fortune, or "Cupid, king of gods and men," that had led him so kindly, so fortunately, to blunder at Harwich, and get on board the wrong boat, which eventually proved the *right* one for him.

With his sense of exultation there was mingled a prayerful emotion of great thankfulness that Alison had escaped amid the

horror of the catastrophe, and that she was, as Llanyard asserted, well. To see her, to have speech with her, to carry her off, now that he could lay wealth at her feet, were the next things to achieve, and to that end it would never do to put up at the same hotel—that mentioned by Gaskins, the groom ; and, truth to tell, he would have had some difficulty in doing that. So he selected another—the Hôtel du Parc—the name of which he gave the driver of the voiture in which he was conveyed. Oh, how lightly and happily beat his heart as he went!—past buildings and streets, all demolished now or being so for the construction of those vast new docks, which will be the boast of Antwerp, and by the Rue Reynders, to the open and spacious Place Verte, where the graceful statue of Rubens in cavalier costume stands, and the north side of which is almost entirely formed by the towering masses of the glorious cathedral.

She was living—thank Heaven!—living and well! was his incessant thought. He had no longer her loss—her death—to sorrow for ; but he had her deliverance to achieve. To wait a year—no ! there was no need for that now ; and he felt that she was his already.

But they had all been some time in Antwerp ; what if Cadbury's influence and her father's authority had prevailed, and—but—no ! He thrust *that* idea aside, and entered the dining-room of the Hôtel du Parc, while the waiter settled with the driver and took charge of his luggage.

“What accommodation did monsieur want?”

“Only a bed-room.”

“For to-night only?”

“No—for some days, weeks perhaps.”

“Monsieur had come to see the churches, the galleries, the Musée Plantin, and all that?”

“Precisely!” exclaimed Goring, with impatience.

“Luncheon, monsieur?” suggested the garrulous waiter, and to be partly rid of him and left to himself, Goring ordered it.

Many hotels overlook the Place Verte ; was she in one of them? Perhaps her eyes were at that same moment looking on what he saw there ; and the tall edifices with smokeless chimneys, the result of the general use of stoves in houses, some old enough and quaint enough to have been seen by Charles V. ; the little carts drawn by dogs ; the little yellow police-vans proceeding to and from the Palais de Justice, escorted by soldier-looking gendarmes in blue tunics, with

white braid and aiguillettes, bear-skin caps, and carbines; women without caps, or with queer poke-bonnets and long dark cloaks; the funeral of a "Liberal" going past—the hearse without cross, candles, or priests, and preceded by a great brass band playing polkas and mazurkas; the Calvarys and Madonnas at the street corners, or in the porte-cochère of houses, all with lamps before them; municipal guards with plumed hats; artisans in blouses and sabots; shabby ill-set-up soldiers of all sorts and sizes, in baggy trousers, queer forage caps, and enormous red worsted shoulder-knots—soldiers between whose appearance and that of "our fellows," Goring drew comparisons not very favourable to the former; priests in shovel hats and long floating cloaks or soutanes, one perhaps preceded by a cross-bearer and acolyte with a bell, bearing the blessed Sacrament to the dying.

High overhead the sweet carillons or musical bells, so common to all the churches in Belgium, were playing merrily in the cathedral spire, from whence, ever and anon announcing the hours and half hours, came the sonorous booms of that vast bell at the baptism of which Charles V stood as "godfather," and which requires the united strength of sixteen men to pull it.

For the first time during a past period Bevil Goring had an appetite, and was well disposed to do justice to the *cuisine* of the Hôtel du Parc—and, truth to tell, the Belgian cookery is second to none in the world; and after having *pâté de foie gras*, and dainty cutlets of veal dressed to perfection, with pastry from Meurice's in the Marché aux Œufs, without which no meal seems perfect in Antwerp, and a glass or two of Chablis, he thought he might as well ask a question or two of the garrulous waiter, who was hovering about, with a white towel over his left shoulder, his thick, short hair oiled, and his moustache waxed and pointed *à l'empereur*.

"What is your name?"

"Jacquot, monsieur," he replied, adopting the first position in dancing, smiling suavely, and pressing his hands together, or working them, as Dickens says, "with invisible soap in imperceptible water."

"In what part of Antwerp is the Rue d'Écosse—is it near the Place Verte?"

"Rue d'Écosse, monsieur—there is no such street in Antwerp."

"Think again, Jacquot, please. I want the Hôtel Lion Rouge, Rue d'Écosse."

"I assure you, monsieur, that there is no such street and no such hotel," replied Jacquot, emphatically.

"I am not mistaken," thought Goring. "Can that rascally groom, in the interests of his master, have been deceiving me?"

As he had no reason for doubting that the waiter was correct in his statement, he felt doubt and anger rise in his heart at the anticipation of trouble and difficulty; for if this fellow Gaskins had recognised and deceived him he would at once sound an alarm.

"Have you heard of an English milord in Antwerp called Milord Cadbury?"

"No, monsieur. There are many hotels; he may be in one."

"Have you a visitors' list in Antwerp?"

"No, monsieur; but here is the Brussels English newspaper, which may contain what monsieur wants."

It was and is a weekly periodical, which gives the names of all visitors to the Belgian capital and its adjacent cities and towns, and after a brief search Goring found the names of "Lord Cadbury, Sir Ranald Cheyne, and Miss Cheyne," as being located at the Hôtel St. Antoine.

"Where is that hotel?"

"Close by, monsieur—at the corner of the Place, adjoining the Marché aux Souliers."

"Thanks, Jacquot," replied Goring, who began to breathe more freely. "Now to consider what my plans must be," he thought. "I must not be rash, but I must act on the instant, as it is quite on the cards that Cadbury may shift their tents to Brussels or elsewhere."

He twisted his moustache and almost ground his teeth at that idea.

"If he does," thought he, "and I can ever lay hands on him, I will parade him at daybreak—by heavens I will!—with an officer from the nearest barracks as my second. There is no explicit law against duelling here as at home, so, my Lord Cadbury, I may make your little game a dear one for you in the end. Now, however, to write to Laura Dalton, or shall I telegraph?"

Jacquot, who had left the room for a minute, now came in with some perturbation in his face and manner.

"An officer of gendarmes wishes to see you, monsieur, immediately, and has given an order to seize your luggage."

"To see me—to seize my luggage! What the devil does

the fellow mean?" exclaimed Goring, who was prompt enough to ire, as he started up from the table on seeing an officer of gendarmes, with his sword at his side, without salute or moving his cap, bluntly enter the room, while giving an order to some others who were outside.

We have said that Bevil Goring had promised to write to Laura Dalton reporting what discoveries he had made of the fate of Alison. But day followed day at Chilcote Grange after his departure, and neither letter nor telegram came from him; and Laura, who was really full of anxiety and concern for both amid her own personal causes for serious thought, began to think that he too had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HÔTEL ST. ANTOINE.

AT the very time that Bevil Goring, unconscious of mischief being worked against him, was discussing his cutlets and Chablis at the Hôtel du Parc, Mr. Gaskins was having an interview with his master, Lord Cadbury, at the adjacent Hôtel St. Antoine.

"Captain Goring in Antwerp!" exclaimed the latter. "How the devil has he discovered that we are here, for that circumstance alone can have brought him at a season when no one travels, and I have sedulously kept my name out of the London papers?"

"It is the greatest lark out!" said Gaskins, bursting for the third time into an explosion of laughter.

"What *is* the greatest lark—what *do* you mean, Gaskins?" asked the peer, with some asperity, while staring at his dependant.

"You remember the arrest of one of these Belgian rigger fellows, who were preparing the yacht, as a Liberal communist, or something of that kind, my lord?"

"Perfectly well."

"He threw into a locker of the cabin some printed revolutionary manifestoes, which were found yesterday by Captain Llanyard, who meant to destroy them, so as to have no bother about the matter; but I slipped them into the railway rugs of

that ere Captain Goring, gave the straight tip to a *jangdarum*, and I have no doubt that before night he will be arrested."

Cadbury actually joined in the explosion of merriment with which his valet concluded this revelation of rascality.

"Egad, you are a genius, Gaskins," said he; "but did Llanyard see you do this?"

"No, my lord."

"Or anyone else?"

"No, I took jolly good care of that."

"On this charge he will be kept close till we can clear out of Antwerp by sea if the yacht is ready in time, or to Brussels, if only Sir Ranald would get well. But you spoke to a gendarme, you say."

"Yes, my lord."

"Your evidence will be wanted—perhaps you did not think of that?"

Gaskins' nether jaw dropped at this suggestion.

"These Belgian and French police are the devils to have anything to do with!" said his master; "and *my* name must not be mixed up with this affair."

"Of course not, my lord," said Gaskins, with a cough.

"Put off your livery at once, change your clothes, and take an early train to Brussels. Keep out of the way till I send for you—and write to me your whereabouts."

And, highly tickled by the whole affair, he gave a handful of money to Gaskins for his expenses.

"Thank you, my lord, I am off like a bird," said the worthy, and he departed singing the music hall ditty, "'Love is like a cup of tea.' By Jove! Captain Goring won't find it so!—

Lovely woman is the sugar;
Spoons we poor men often be—

"*La-la-de-da!* Miss Cheyne," and, chuckling over the mischief he thought he had put in motion, Mr. Gaskins took his departure from the Hôtel St. Antoine in a cab for the station of *Chemin de fer de l'État*, near the Zoological Gardens.

Cadbury's jealousy was roused again; he was most thoroughly enraged by the idea of Goring being at Antwerp when he was beginning to think he had Alison almost as much to himself as she had been when in the yacht; and yet he did not see much of her, as she was so constantly in attendance upon the sick-bed of her father.

Cadbury's fancy for her was a peculiar one. It was not love, we have before said ; not that his day for what he thought that sentiment to be, was past, "because," as a writer says, "till the grave has closed over him, it is impossible to say of any man that his day for that, or its *fac-simile*, infatuation, is finished."

All his life he had been engaged in *affaires du cœur*—affairs more or less coarse ; but never before had he found a girl of such refinement, beauty, and character as Alison Cheyne thrown by the mere force of circumstances almost on his mercy ; and now, after all the trouble he had taken, the expense of taking up the bills collected by Solomon Slagg, her aversion and resistance piqued and perhaps exasperated him, and he longed for the time when he should feel that he triumphed over and humbled her, he cared little how.

"How long—oh, Lord!—how long is this life of weariness and anxiety to last and be endured?"

It was Alison who said this, in a whisper to herself, as she sat in the half-lighted room, in which her father lay a-bed, ill, and sick, and faint, his head still suffering from the blow he had received on the night of the collision—a blow that nearly gave him concussion of the brain, and might yet prove serious at his years, and with his now broken constitution. He lay in the plain but not unluxurious bed-room of a Belgian hotel—the St. Antoine. The walls were lofty, papered with sage-green paper ; the bare and uncarpeted oak floor was varnished and polished like the face of a mirror ; a cheerful fire was in the square black iron stove that stood in front of the carved oak mantelpiece, whereon was an elegant French clock, above which rose a lofty mirror, and on each side of which were large vases full of flowers, arranged by the hands of Alison—chiefly roses, which at that season are brought all the way from Nice to Antwerp—by railway, of course. She heard the carillons sounding pleasantly in the evening air overhead apparently, and ever and anon the horns and bells of the passing tram-cars as they glided through the Place Verte.

Among the decorations of the bed-chamber hung a large engraving of an English hunting scene, with the dogs in full cry scampering over fences and ditches, and her eyes often wandered towards it, as, in her mind, it was associated with the last day she had been out with the Royal Buckhounds, and rode from the green lane home to Chilcote Beeches accom-

panied by Bevil Goring. And then from the picture she would turn to watch her father's pale and sleeping face. The grim visitant had more than once seemed nigh; but Sir Ranald Cheyne clung persistently to earth and earthly things.

Alison sat close to his bedside, for he who lay there seemed—save someone far away, she thought—all that she had to cling to; she was in a circle of light shed by a lamp upon a pedestal, and an unread Tauchnitz volume lay on her lap forgotten—"Tales of Flemish Life," by Hendrik Conscience, the Walter Scott of Flanders.

She looked pale, worn, and wan. Sorrow and trouble were beginning to tell upon her now; wakeful nights, restless days, and incessant anxious thoughts were all robbing her of the bloom of perfect youth; the sweetness of lip, the softness of brow, the light of eye, were all passing away, and even her voice was changing, and becoming starved and thin, if we may use the expression. While in the yacht she had escaped her father's peevishness to some extent, and the misery of her home life in another, with its struggle for appearances and bare existence, its saving and scraping, and the duns of ever urgent creditors; but then she had undergone the grief of a rough separation from Bevil, with the annoyance the presence of Lord Cadbury gave her.

"If I can only get through all this, nurse papa well, and get back to Bevil, or to where I can hear of him, how happy—how thankful I shall be!"

Though absent in body, she was ever present in spirit with Bevil; but how little could she conceive that he was at that very time so near her!

One of those horrible bats peculiar to Antwerp, and which begin to flit about as evening falls, came bang against the panes of the lighted window and woke Sir Ranald.

"Still sitting there, bird Ailie," said he, "and not reading; of what are you thinking?"

"Of home."

"What home—Chilcote or Essilmont?—of course you prefer the former now?"

"Well, I do not care particularly for Chilcote; in my mind it is associated with gloom and struggles; I had nothing on earth to leave there but the fowls, the birds I spread crumbs for, the apple-trees and the flowers, and some little trifles,

sketches, books, and nick-nacks that had become familiarly dear to me."

But she did refer to the first and piercing thought of her life—Bevil Goring.

"Poor Alison!" said her father, as she kissed his brow and arranged his pillows; "your little hands have quite enough to do for me."

"They are diminutive members, perhaps, papa, but useful, anyway," she replied, with a faint smile.

"Here in Antwerp there are many things you should see, poor child—the churches, galleries, museums, the Steyne. Cadbury suggests I should get a nursing sister. This is dull work for you, darling, and you must go out."

"I could not bear to see another nursing you. It is not the custom here for young girls to go out alone, and I have no companion, no escort—not even poor little Daisy Prune now."

"Why, there is Cadbury."

She shivered at the name, and a gesture of impatience and anger escaped her. Well used as she had grown, in the affection of her heart, to subdue all emotions in the presence of her ailing father, to whom she had devoted herself, it was not in human nature but to feel wroth at the trickery to which she had been subjected, which had caused Daisy Prune to lose her life, and by which they might all have perished.

Her father had never ceased to urge Cadbury's suit upon her in the intervals of his strength, and as in the affectionate heart of Alison there was a painful struggle between contempt and pity, sorrow and fear—contempt for his selfishness and avarice, pity for his fallen pride, sorrow for his condition, and a great fear of her own future, for if he should die there she would be utterly alone in the world—alone and penniless in Antwerp!

Once she had thought he was nearly gone, especially on the first night he had been conveyed to the hotel from the shattered yacht at the Quai Van Dyck; but thanks to her care, more perhaps than even the skill of a Belgian doctor, he had drifted slowly but surely back from the confines of the spirit world to consciousness and what was comparative strength.

And when the latter came he at once took up the weary and querulous rôle of which the poor girl was so sick at heart.

She was never weary of pondering over the strange fact that the name of the vessel by which they had so nearly perished

was the *Black Hound*, of Ostend—the dog of the family tradition. It was certainly, to say the least of it, a strange coincidence, and many an instance of its alleged appearance in time of woe occurred to her as she sat brooding there.

Among others when an uncle of hers—a younger brother of Sir Ranald—had gone fishing up the Ythan at Ellon, and days passed on without his returning. A search was made, and Archie Auchindoir saw a black hound stealthily drinking at a pool in the river, from which on his approach it disappeared into a pine thicket, and soon after he saw at the very spot where it had been drinking the pallid face of her drowned uncle appear, as his body came to the surface. This uncle had always been fond of gazing into the water, either still or running, and had often been heard to declare that this pool—a famous salmon one—had a strong fascination for him; and there he came—none knew how—to his end.

And now, as she thought of these things, the girl's memory wandered fondly away to the pleasant days of her childhood at Essilmont, where there were no high walls or great houses, as here at Antwerp, to shut out the pure air and bright sunshine of God, but where all was so open and free; and so, in fancy, she was again there, amid the white snows of winter, when the Ythan was frozen between its banks; the trees were covered with glittering crystalline hoar frost, and the braes were shrouded with snow; when the primroses and violets of spring peeped up under the budding timber; when the forests were leafy in summer; the fox-glove blazed ruddy amid the green underwood, and when there was a glow equal to dawn through all the short June nights in the glorious North; and in autumn, when the golden corn waved on the upland slopes, and beautiful were the fern and heath that covered the bonnie, bonnie braes she might never look upon again, and the tears of a great tenderness and love of her old Scottish home welled up in her eyes at the thought; but she dried them in haste as she became aware that her father was speaking to her again, and upon the old obnoxious topic.

“Yes, Alison, as I was saying—and you seemed to assent by your silence—many marriages turn out very well that have no better basis than mutual liking.”

“But in this instance there would be none; and on my side there are loathing and contempt now! How wise the frogs were in *Æsop*! They had a great mind to have some water, papa,

but they did not leap into the well lest they might not get out again."

"This is most objectionable language, Alison," exclaimed her father; "how often am I to remind you that the young ladies of the world we move in—or *should* move in—seldom marry for what poets and fellows of that kind call love, but almost invariably for money and position; and Cadbury is certainly a more than eligible candidate for your hand."

"I should like, papa, to have some of the brightness of a girl's life before I marry."

"Alison, you could have as much brightness after your marriage as any reasonable being could desire."

Alison was silent.

Brightness, she was thinking. Yes, with Bevil Goring, but *not* with Lord Cadbury. Oh, why was Bevil so poor that he could not boldly claim her at once? Yet, poor as she deemed him to be, gladly would she have cast her lot in life with him, but for the opposition and wishes of the poor old man who lay there.

"Think of how good, how kind Lord Cadbury is, and of the expense to which we must put him," said Sir Ranald, after a time.

"I think not of that; his kindness is forced upon us; and surely I may consider my own freedom of action, my own wishes, tastes, and life."

"I wish you would be a little more considerate, and think of your old father at times."

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, and then she sighed bitterly.

"How often and how long, oh heaven! am I to hear all this over and over again?"

"Here comes Cadbury to sit with me, I suppose, so you may go to your own room," said Sir Ranald, as the suitor appeared at the door in full evening costume prior to sitting down to dinner, and she gladly withdrew.

"Sir Ranald," said he in a low, but excited tone of voice, "I have some news for you."

Now, my Lord Cadbury hated sickness, suffering, death-beds, "and all that sort of thing," and he had generally avoided Sir Ranald just now, so the latter raised himself on his elbow expectantly.

"News?" said he.

"Yes—that fellow Goring is in Antwerp."

"Goring! How do you know?"

"Gaskins saw him on board my yacht, where he actually had the insolence to make some inquiries, but Gaskins is a trump, and sent him on a wrong scent."

He did not tell the story of his too probable arrest, as the honourable spirit of Sir Ranald Cheyne would never consent to having a conspiracy of that kind hatched which might prove the utter destruction of an innocent English gentleman, but he knit his brows and said: "We must be careful now, and conceal this circumstance from Alison."

"Of course, and you must get well as soon as you can, that we may decamp from Antwerp."

"Curse this Goring!" thought Sir Ranald. "A fine fellow truly, who has only his debts and liabilities to offer in lieu of solid marriage settlements; but for him, and his mal-influence on that idiot girl, through Cadbury, Essilmont, manor house, tower, and fortalice, mains and acres might yet all be mine, and my name not be erased from the roll of country gentlemen in Aberdeenshire!"

He sighed and moaned heavily, and Cadbury, who was a bad hand at consolation or sympathy, looked on with angry eyes and knitted brow.

That Alison, with a will of her own, should have a fancy for—even desire to marry—the wrong man was, Sir Ranald at times thought, natural enough, but that she should fancy a "beggarly fellow" like this Goring, as he deemed him, was monstrous, while Cadbury's wealth and rank were thrown into the opposite scale!

So Cadbury soon withdrew, and Sir Ranald was left to muse sadly and bitterly on the perversity of his only child and the prospects of his race.

He was the last baronet, he knew, of Essilmont, and at his death the last rood that remained to him there—the last of the old, old heritage of his forefathers—would pass with him, and what then would become of Alison? His proud, yet selfish and affectionate, soul died within him at the thought of her future, if she pursued her present line of conduct.

Ranald was gone, and Ellon too. He must follow soon, and, even if he had his wish, to him it seemed sad in his family vanity that the world should be threatened with the extinction

of the good old name of Cheyne of Essilmont, even though the last of the line became Lady Cadbury.

"Cadbury—faugh—a *parvenu*!" was his next peevish thought; "and now here was this fellow Bevil Goring on their trail, in full search no doubt!" and he knew that

There never yet was human power
That could evade, if unforgiven,
The potent *search* and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN THE RUE DES BEGUINES.

"EVERYONE has a romance in their life," Dalton had said to Goring one day, referring, no doubt, to the romance that formed a part of his own; "to some it comes early, to others late."

Goring thought of that remark when he found that his abrupt visitor was an officer of gendarmes come to arrest and carry him before a magistrate. For what?

Was this a bit of his romance, or a disgusting reality? We fear he found it the latter eventually.

"For what am I wanted?" he asked, haughtily.

"You will learn that soon enough, monsieur."

"And to where must I accompany you?"

"To the police station—first."

"First—and where afterwards?"

"That is as may be—but I have not come here to answer your questions—especially if asked in such a tone."

"I am an officer in Her Britannic Majesty's service."

"Officers in Her Britannic Majesty's service do not usually come to Belgium with such papers as have been found among your baggage."

"The fellow is mad!" exclaimed Goring, on which the gendarme uttered a growl and struck the brass hilt of his sword significantly with his left hand.

"If monsieur is a British officer perhaps he has his cards about him?" he said, after a little pause.

"Of course I have," replied Goring, and proceeded in haste to investigate, but in vain, the pockets of his coat.

"The case is gone; I have dropped it somehow," he exclaimed, in perplexity and confusion.

"Bah!" exclaimed the gendarme; "I thought so—come along; we are but wasting time."

A voiture was summoned. A gendarme mounted on the box beside the driver, other two stepped inside with Goring, who, thus escorted, was driven in silence through several streets, just as the lamps were being lighted, to a police-station in a narrow alley, near the Rempart Saint Catharine, where he was conducted into a species of office, over the mantelpiece of which were the ancient arms of the city of Antwerp, like those of Edinburgh, a castle triple-towered with three banners, each bearing a human hand, and there he found himself before a juge de paix or préfet, he knew not which; but a portly individual armed with considerable authority, and determined apparently to use it.

"For what purpose or reason am I brought here, monsieur?" asked Goring, haughtily and angrily.

The man in authority—the préfet, we shall call him—drew from his pocket a bronze medal attached to a ribbon, and shook it in his face, saying brusquely: "I will teach you to know the Belgian colours when you see them. Gardez-vous!" he added.

Goring was too much of a soldier and gentleman to insult or resist any constituted authority, and, believing the whole affair to be, if not a joke, some explainable mistake, awaited the next move with patience.

A whispered conversation went on in French between his captors and the préfet, who made several entries in a large book, looking through his large, round spectacles at their prisoner from time to time, and then most severely at a little roll of printed papers, which the officer of gendarmes laid before him.

"What is all this about—what is the meaning of this absurdity, this outrage?" demanded Goring.

"No outrage at all," replied the official, knitting his brows.

"Why has my baggage been seized?"

"You will learn in good time. *Sapristi.*"

"Why not now?"

"Well, it contained what it should not."

"My baggage?"

"Yes."

"It was duly inspected by the *douanier* at the quay and passed."

"Yes; your portmanteau, as he is here ready to affirm," replied the préfet; "but not your roll of railway-rugs?"

"And what the deuce was in it?"

"That which you were too cunning to have in your portmanteau."

"Too cunning to put in my portmanteau!" said Goring, in utter bewilderment, and almost inclined to laugh now.

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed the other, using that exclamation which is for ever on a Belgian tongue; "don't repeat my words, insolent! You concealed there these revolutionary papers, the existence of which and your object in coming to Belgium were duly and fortunately reported to the police the moment you stepped upon the Quai Van Dyck."

"My object—reported—and by whom?"

"I do not precisely know—one of your countrymen, however; it was reported to the gendarme on duty there, and the report proved a true one. Here is a roll of nearly fifty circulars issued by the chiefs of the late French Commune in three languages, one of them being Flemish, inciting a rising against kings and all constituted authorities, which no doubt you intended to distribute here in the cause of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social democracy."

Goring was so confounded by all this that he remained for a moment or two silent, and then he laughed heartily.

"You will find this no laughing matter—*Sapristi!*" exclaimed the other, dipping a pen in the ink-bottle. "Your name, coquin?"

Goring's brow knit at this epithet; so he replied sternly, giving his name and rank.

"Calls himself a British officer, does he?" said the magistrate to the gendarmes, who laughed at it as a joke.

"Were you ever in Belgium before?"

"No."

"What is your profession or occupation?"

"I have already told you."

"Are you married?"

"Really, monsieur, your questions border on the impertinent."

"You are an Englishman?"

"I am glad to say I am."

"But well acquaint with Lester Squarr, I doubt not, where all the foreign *canaille* do congregate?"

"You are an insolent fool."

"We shall teach you to play tricks in Belgium, however."

"D—n Belgium!" exclaimed Goring, losing patience utterly at last. "I wish it was a few inches under the sea, instead of being a few inches out of it."

"*C'est excellent, c'est excellent! Je déclare qu'il est incorrigible. Gendarmes, remenez-le à prison—Rue des Beguines,*" exclaimed the préfet, furiously.

"This is beyond a joke now, by Jove; it is as well the mess don't know of it," was Goring's first thought. "I should be quizzed to death as the agitator of Republican principles in Belgium. And this cursed confusion and detention will prevent me from discovering Alison."

He was now deprived of *her* ring, in spite of all his protestations and supplications that it might be left with him; his watch and purse were also taken from him; but all were carefully put fast, however, and in a few minutes more, escorted by gendarmes with drawn swords, and followed by a crowd of fellows in blue blouses and wooden sabots, he was conducted past the church of St. Augustine, in the Rue des Beguines, to the great towering prison, the walls of which overshadow the centre of the Rue des Beguines, and there, after being formally handed over to the care of the *concierge* in a little chamber scantily furnished, with a strongly grated window, he found himself left to his own reflections.

Pride of his position as an English gentleman, and as a British officer bearing the royal commission, rose in revolt in his heart at the grotesque insult put upon him through some extraordinary mistake: and though he was conscious that the rascally valet Gaskins had deceived him as to the address of his master, and was aware that the latter and Sir Ranald too would now be put upon their guard and shift their quarters, thus making approaches to Alison more difficult, Goring never for a moment connected him with his present predicament, the escape from which, by some legal and constitutional measure, would have to be seen to at once.

Doubtless with morning the whole folly of the affair would be brought to light, and in the meanwhile he could but resort to patience, while the hours were chimed and carillons rung in the adjacent church of St. André, wherein a portrait of Mary

Queen of Scots now marks the grave of two English ladies, her attendants, one of whom received her last embrace previous to her execution.

He could also hear the artillery trumpets sounding tattoo in the Caserne des Prédicateurs, and the sound made him think of the merriment and luxury prevailing at that very hour in the mess-room at Aldershot, and of his regiment now far away on the billow in the transport then steaming along the western coast of Africa.

Then his adopted patience deserted him, and he started to his feet, only to anathematise the people of Antwerp generally, their authorities in particular, and to seat himself hopelessly again on a somewhat hard chair.

Morning came ; the day passed on and the evening also, and again he heard the shrill trumpets pealing out tattoo in the echoing square of the artillery barracks ; and many days and nights followed each other, till he was well-nigh mad with exasperation and anxiety, but no token came of release or further examination.

If some absurd or misleading paragraph appeared in the Belgian papers, and from these found its way into the English journals, what strange views of his predicament might not be taken by his friends and the military authorities at home !

But the Belgian police, like other similar forces on the Continent, are very reticent with reference to their own movements and affairs ; and, as yet, they prevented him from communicating with our consul at Antwerp, our ambassador at Brussels, or by letter with his solicitors, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, & Scrawly, Gray's Inn Square, the presence of one of whom in Antwerp might have proved of vast service to him just then.

So the weary days passed on, and Bevil Goring thought with truth that he would have cause to remember long the bitter coffee and onion soup—or *soupe-maigre*—and the *Ratatouil*, Flemish for a ragout made of scraps of meat, during his enforced abode in the Rue des Beguines !

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ENNUI AND WEARINESS.

BUT for her love for Bevil Goring, Alison felt at times that she would have sacrificed herself for her father. Selfish and coldly proud though his nature was, still he *was* her father, and she was his last link to earth—the last link of that long chain of ancestors he prized so much, and who went back to the years of the War of Independence, and beyond them.

Yes—out of pity for him she might have sacrificed herself to Cadbury; but now the image of Bevil Goring rendered that impossible, and even death itself preferable.

Poor girl! moped in that great dull hotel, she wearied sorely. Her father was kind to her after a fashion of his own, but she longed regretfully for the past time when she could throw her arms around her mother's neck and lay her head upon her breast—the panacea for all young folks whose troubles seem overwhelming; but what were the troubles that beset her when that dear mother was alive, compared with those that beset her now?

And with regard to these, she knew what that mother's advice would have been: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

My Lord Cadbury was rather tiring, or getting exasperated by the slow success of his love affair, and was beginning to think seriously of how he would separate Alison from her "bore of a father," and get her alone with him, perhaps to Brussels, where his rascal Gaskins would easily procure him apartments.

For some time past his lordship had cunningly dropped the *rôle* of lover and adopted that of friend, perhaps to throw Alison off her guard, and as he did not—as some old fellows do—act "the paternal" part, to a certain extent she became so, and her normal state or feeling of defiance and dislike was dulled for a time.

Thus her face looked calm and placid, with a curiously pathetic expression, and her eyes had at times a far-away look in them that gave Sir Ranald a strange dull pain in his heart, especially one evening, when, taking grapes one by one from a

plate of painted Antwerp china-ware, she fed him playfully as a nurse might a child.

"Bird Ailie," said he, "my dear bird Ailie." He saw how her hand looked quite transparent, and a pang of dismay smote his heart. "You are not well, darling," said he.

"Oh yes, papa," she replied, with affected cheerfulness, "I am very well; but oh, if we were only home again out of this foggy Antwerp! I think I could wheel you about in a Bath chair as well as old Archie, were we only home to——"

"Where?" he asked sharply. "But I must take care of you now for my own sake. This confinement is killing you; go out somewhere, anywhere under Cadbury's escort."

But Alison shook her head. As yet she had seen nothing of the famous city of Antwerp, though she could not look forth from her windows in the quaint Place Verte, or along the Marché aux Souliers, with all its shops, without a longing to explore, everything seemed so strange, so striking; for, as Sir Walter Scott wrote truthfully and graphically: "It is in the streets of Antwerp and Brussels that the eye rests upon the forms of architecture which appear in the pictures of the Flemish School—those fronts richly decorated with various ornaments, and terminating in roofs, the slope of which is concealed from the eye by windows and gables still more highly ornamented; the whole comprising a general effect which, from its grandeur and intricacy, at once amuses and delights the spectator. In fact, this rich intermixture of towers and battlements and projecting windows, highly sculptured, joined to the height of the houses and the variety of ornaments upon their fronts, produce an effect as superior to those of the tame uniformity of a modern street as the casque of a warrior exhibits over the slouched, broad-brimmed beaver of a Quaker."

Another remarkable feature in the Belgian streets is the enormous height of the front doors, with rings and knockers of brass, often more than a foot in diameter.

Lord Cadbury had received a card of invitation *pour milord et ses dames* to a *Redoute monstre et fête de nuit* at the Théâtre des Variétés, where there was to be a species of *bal masqué* in the great saloon, and on the stage a "Kermesse Flamande, Fête Venitienne," as it was announced, and he entreated Sir Ranald's permission to take Alison with him, simply as a spectator in her street costume.

All the ladies who dance at these balls wear masks and black

silk dominoes over their ball dresses ; the gentlemen are in evening dress, and do not wear masks, as he explained to her : and Alison, *ennuyée* and weary of confinement, consented to go, at her father's urgent request, though she was without a chaperon ; but then, as the former said, no one knew her in Antwerp.

When Alison thought of Lord Cadbury's wishes and proposals as regarded herself, she felt that she ought not to accompany him to this fête, but her love for Bevil seemed to guard her like a suit of armour ; the temptation to see a little of outdoor life prevailed, and so she yielded, but not without dread and reluctance. Was this a prevision of what was to come ?

That morning she had been at a well-known *coiffeur's* getting her hair dressed, and was rather scared than amused to see gentlemen and ladies seated side by side in the saloon, under the hands of his assistants, the former getting their beards shaved and moustaches trimmed, and the latter their back hair brushed and dressed : but though this was only a specimen of the freedom of Belgian life, young ladies, she knew, could not go abroad without a chaperon ; but then, Lord Cadbury, she reflected, was old enough to be her father.

He would take the greatest care of her—the scene would be a brilliant one, and one, moreover, entirely new to her.

"And I am not to go in costume or wear a domino ?" said Alison, anxiously.

"No—as a spectator only—your hat and sealskin jacket, of course ; but we shall see the dancers from the promenade round the saloon, and the Flemish scene on the stage about half-past ten."

"Can you spare me, papa ?" she asked softly.

"Yes, darling, go," he replied weakly but earnestly.

So a voiture was summoned, and Alison departed after dinner, escorted by Lord Cadbury. Through the broad and spacious Rue de l'Hôpital and Rue Grande, with its quaint old houses, to the private entrance of the Théâtre des Variétés in the Rue des Escrimeurs, a narrow street, and never in all her future life did she repent of any action more bitterly.

The brief change of scene or action would draw her from herself, as she had been afflicted with severe distracting thoughts of late.

Had Bevil gone to the seat of war, or was he still in England ? She was as ignorant of his movements as he nearly was

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The brief change of scene or action would draw her from herself, as she had been afflicted with severe distracting thoughts of late.

Had Bevil gone to the seat of war, or was he still in England ? She was as ignorant of his movements as he nearly was

of hers ; but it was too probably the former, and she supposed he would soon be face to face with danger and death. Her absence—her flight it would seem—from Chilcote, she supposed, must be all unexplained to him, and, if explained, he would learn that she was with Lord Cadbury ; and, after all he knew, what might he not fear and *think* ? Think that which might lead him to believe she was untrue, and leave him to be happy yet with some *other* girl, who might love him as she now loved him, and as he wished to be loved.

And more keenly did these thoughts distract her mind after the—to her—fatal night of the *bal masqué*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LE REDOUTE MONSTRE.

ALISON found herself in a great oblong saloon, brilliantly lighted by crystal gasaliers, decorated by lofty mirrors, surrounded by a colonnade of elegant pillars and overlooked by a balustraded orchestra occupied by the fine band of the Garde Municipale. The centre of this saloon, the floor of which was carefully waxed, was specially reserved for dancers ; but a platform on four sides of it, and without the lines of pillars, was occupied by promenaders, for whom there were seats and lounges.

One end was closed by the proscenium and green curtain of the Théâtre des Variétés.

The majority of the male dancers were in evening costume, though a few wore fancy dresses, and there were spider-waisted Belgian officers from the adjacent Caserne St. Georges, with loose gold epaulets, dark blue tunics, and baggy light gray pantaloons.

Many of the ladies were in fancy costume—some a little *prononcé*, being almost that of the corps de ballet, though their dresses were often trimmed with rich, old, coffee-coloured Flemish lace ; but the majority wore dominoes of black satin or silk, and all had black velvet masks and thin black lace veils, or head-dresses, like the Spanish mantilla, so commonly worn by the women in some parts of Belgium—a relic of the days of the Duke of Alva—the “Castigador de los Flamencos.”

Many were hovering about in corners, or near certain pillars, evidently waiting to keep appointments made elsewhere with those who would recognise them—though masked to the upper lip—by a particular flower worn in the breast, by the rosettes on their white kid boots, a little patch on the chin, or so forth ; and while the round dances—waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas—were in progress, Alison, to whom the scene was entirely new, watched the lovers—for such she supposed they must be, and no doubt many were—and, with an interest in which her own heart shared, saw many a glad meeting, a smile, a pressure of the hand interchanged ; and then by tacit consent they whirled into the gay and fast-increasing throng, while overhead the music of Strauss or Chopin came pealing from the lofty orchestra.

Alison felt her little feet beating time to the music, the “Soldatenlieder” of Herr Gung’l, “Je t’aime” of Waldteufel, and so forth. How she longed, sealskin jacket and all, to join in the then delicious waltzes ! She was very young, and life would indeed be wretched were it a blank at her years. The whole scene was a novel and brilliant one ; most strange to her eyes, and, if her situation was an anxious one in Antwerp, it was not without its sad romance ; but for a time, as she looked around her, she forgot even that, or was only recalled to it when Lord Cadbury addressed her.

And, meanwhile, the *parvenu* peer, pleased with the delicate beauty of his companion, in whose pale cheeks a little rose-leaf tint now came, with a sparkle in her usually quiet eyes, felt very vain of the handsome girl who leant on his arm, and attracted the admiration of many a passing and many a lingering man, who hovered near to admire her.

Among these were two Englishmen, Sir Jasper Dehorsey (a sporting baronet) and his friend, Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, also well known, and not very reputably, on various racecourses. They seemed to know no one there, and were mere spectators, though doubtless amid that vast throng they might have introduced themselves to some of the fair dominoes without being severely repulsed. Both were in full evening-dress, with loose, light dust coat worn open, and crush hat under the arm ; both were gentlemanly in bearing and appearance, and their faces would have been good but for the sinister, rakish, and *blasé* expression of their eyes, and the sensual and sneering curve of their lips. Sir Jasper, the taller of the two by half a head,

stuck his glass in his right eye, and said: "Tom, look at that girl with the blue velvet hat; she is English—I'll swear she is."

"And a regular beauty, by Jove!"

"Doooid curious place for her to be, this. She is all right, I suppose; what do *you* think?"

"I think it doubtful—hails from the latitude of Regent Street, I should say," replied the other, who thought evil of everyone and everything.

"Who is that *moyen-âge* individual with the white horse-shoe shaped moustache and coarse ears, who seems to regard her with such a proprietary air?"

"By Jove, it is old Cadbury!" exclaimed Hawksleigh.

"Cadbury—it is!" added the baronet; "the little party can't be particular to a shade if she is with *him*. She'll not set much store on the whole duty of woman."

"What is that?" asked Hawksleigh.

"Why, to get married—to get well married, if possible, but anyhow, to get married on any terms."

"He is a lord; but a silk purse can't be made out of a sow's ear."

"I am too poor a devil just now to sneer at his money or position, or, by Jove, I would do so at both. His father was 'something' in the City, whatever that means. Let us take the girl from him."

"All right—I am your man," exclaimed Hawksleigh.

"He doesn't seem to have even an old woman to play propriety or act chaperon."

"When did *he* ever study Mrs. Grundy? But to see such a girl as this with him reminds me of Beauty and the Beast."

"Her wisdom is no doubt in her dressing-case, and her modesty—well, ah—in her pocket, I suppose. Well, here goes——"

"Stop, don't be too hasty. Ah! the old rip, he doesn't care about acting lotus-eater at Cadbury Court, and so has come abroad with 'somebody's luggage.' *Who* can the little girl be?"

"Not much, when she is with him, as I said before," responded the *blasé* baronet. "We'll soon find out. Like the conspirators in a burlesque, who turn up the collars of their coats, we must say, 'Let us dissemble!'"

What their precise plans were they perhaps scarcely knew, but half-past ten was announced as the time when, as the pro-

gramme had it, the curtain was to rise on the *Rideau de Séparation de la Scène, et commencement de la Kermesse*, when the stage appeared with a landscape and busy groups in peasant costume, showing the whole business of a Flemish fair; the dancing ceased, and an immediate rush towards the proscenium took place from all parts of the saloon, the refreshment-rooms, and adjacent passages.

The Belgians are not famous for their politeness, and many of those present on this occasion were of the bourgeois class; thus when the curtain rose there was instantly a rough, unceremonious, and furious crowding towards the proscenium, and in the crush the hand of Alison was torn from the arm of Cadbury, and they were hopelessly separated by a crowd of more than a thousand persons, tightly wedged together. So far were they apart that he totally failed to see anything of her or where she was, and nearly an hour elapsed before the follies of the *Kermesse* were over, and a resumption of the dancing dispersed the crowd about the greater space of the saloon. Immediately on this taking place, Cadbury began a search on every hand, amid all the groups and in all the adjacent rooms and corridors—even between the wings of the now open stage—for Alison, but she was nowhere to be seen. He questioned the waiters, the doorkeeper, and other officials, but none had seen any lady, who answered to the description given leave the hall.

Midnight was past now, and as the *bal masqué* would last till four in the morning hundreds of more ticket-holders came crowding in, and Cadbury became at last convinced—and with no small alarm—that Alison must have quitted the place, and missing him, or indifferent as to what he might think, had got a voiture and driven home to their hotel. When he quitted the theatre and got a similar vehicle snow was falling heavily, and when he reached the Hôtel St. Antoine great was his alarm and dismay to find from the *concierge* and waiters that she had not returned!

Not returned—snow falling and the cathedral bell tolling one in the morning.

Her room was searched; she was evidently not there—not with her father or in any part of the house. No doubt remained of that.

With all his selfishness, Cadbury was dismayed and enraged. Where was she—with *whom*?

The snow was still falling, and the storm showed no sign of abatement. The vast space of the Place Verte was one sheet of white, across which the lights from the hotel windows and the street lamps cast long lines of radiance, and high in the tall spire jangled the merry carillons.

"Out in a night like this—in a foreign city, more than half the inhabitants of which speak nothing but Flemish, where can she be?" he thought. "Why does she not make an effort to get back to the hotel?"

He drove back to the Théâtre des Variétés, where the music and the dancing were still in full progress, to repeat his inquiries in vain; when morning dawned the snow had ceased, but there was no appearance of Alison.

"This will kill her father!" was now Cadbury's thought.

Had an accident befallen her? With earliest dawn he had messengers despatched to all the hospitals and gendarme stations, but in vain. No accident had happened, nor had anyone answering to the description of Alison been seen.

Her absence could no longer be concealed from her horrified father, who at once concluded that she must have eloped with Goring, of whose predicament and whereabouts Cadbury had kept him ignorant, so he was not ill-pleased to let him think so.

Rage at the adventurer, as he deemed Goring, acted like a spur on Sir Ranald. He left his sick couch and seemed to make a struggle to get well that he might join in the search and trace *them* out.

Cadbury had not been without daring ideas of luring Alison away from Sir Ranald and compromising her; but now she was he knew not where, and in the hands of a man perhaps more unscrupulous than himself. His memory was now full of the hundred terrible stories he had read in the public prints of English girls entrapped to Belgium and never heard of again, and, though his mind was prone to evil, he was exasperated as well as dismayed when days passed and no tidings were heard of the lost one.

It was winter in earnest now. The banks of the Scheldt were fringed by masses of ice, and ice covered all the great basins of Antwerp, while stainless snow shrouded all the surrounding country, and the stone Madonnas at the street corners had a chill and deadly aspect, for it was weather to make hands blue and noses red, as the frost was keen and strong.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CAFÉ AU PROGRÈS.

THE two Englishmen to whom we have referred—Sir Jasper Dehorney and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh—saw how Cadbury and Alison were for the time hopelessly separated by the pleasure-seeking crowd, and hastened at once to improve the occasion by taking advantage of the confusion and of her excessive dismay.

After a word or two of hasty instructions whispered to his friend, Sir Jasper approached Alison, and said, with a profound bow: "They are rather *sans cérémonie* here, but don't be alarmed. I shall take care of you. Trust to me, and permit me," he added, drawing her little hand over his left arm, and leading her away in a direction opposite to where he knew Cadbury was doing his utmost to get free of the crowd. "Do not be alarmed," he resumed, "we shall soon restore you to your friend."

He spoke most suavely, as though he was, what he wished her to think him—a chivalrous and gallant protector, and sooth to say, Alison was glad to hear an English voice, and to see some who appeared like an English gentleman, and, externally, Sir Jasper certainly was one.

"This way, please; let me draw you out of the crowd," said he, guiding her towards one of the saloon doors.

"How rude—how rough the people are!" exclaimed Alison, with reference to the crowd that separated her from Lord Cadbury, of whom she could see nothing now, and the hubbub of the *kermesse* on the stage was stunning.

"Well," said Sir Jasper with a lazy smile, "they are not the *crème de la crème* of Antwerp, nor *crème* of any kind; and, truth to tell, I was surprised to see you here."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Alison, with annoyance at having been lured, as she certainly was, into a false position.

At that moment Mr. Hawksleigh, who had been in the corridor, came to say that Lord Cadbury, being unable to find the young lady, had gone to the Café or Restaurant au Progrès.

"Without me!" exclaimed Alison.

"His lordship felt faint, and awaits you there."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes," was the reply of the unblushing Mr. Tom Hawksleigh.

"Most strange!"

"Shall we not follow him?" urged Sir Jasper, with his blandest tone.

"I ought to go home to the Hôtel St. Antoine," said Alison, with doubt now added to her dismay.

"You can't do that alone. The Restaurant au Progrès is close by—almost a part of the theatre—and if Lord Cadbury is unwell——"

"Then let us go instantly, please."

He led her at once from the hall and down the staircase, up which fresh groups—men in evening dress and ladies in masks and dominoes—were crowding, all laughing and joyous, and thence into the Rue des Escrimeurs, where they crossed the street, and entered into a brilliantly-lighted café; but avoiding the great pillared dining or supper hall, which was fitted up with marble tables, crowded with guests (many of them masked dominoes), he led her upstairs to a private supper-room, preceded by a waiter, to whom he gave some instructions rapidly in French.

Where was Lord Cadbury? he inquired.

The waiter did not know. Among the many now in the café, milord might be one; but he would inquire. "Meantime, what did monsieur wish for supper?"

In the fair cheek of Alison the delicate colour came and went, and in her eyes there was a strange look of inquiry as she glanced from one man to the other, ignorant that in an instant there was a secret understanding between them, and that the Belgian *valet de cabaret* took in the whole situation at once.

"Supper—ah—à la carte—salmi of guinea fowl, ris d'agneau, sauce champignon, and some Moselle. Meantime, ask for his lordship."

The waiter grinned in what Alison thought a disagreeable manner, and disappeared with his towel over his arm.

The decorations of the little room were very handsome. The hangings were of blue silk, the floor was polished oak, and the chairs were all lounges of blue velvet, but some of the statuettes on brackets and consoles were, to say the least of them, a little startling in design.

"This is a very strange place," said Alison. "I cannot imagine what induced Lord Cadbury to select it."

"Have you been in this part of the world long?" asked Sir Jasper, as he divested himself of his light dust-coat.

"A few weeks—I was about to say years."

"Poor girl! Has the time been so slow?"

"Well," said Alison, haughtily, as she disliked his pitying tone, "I have the old and ailing——"

"Cadbury to nurse—surely not?"

"Of course not, sir. How could you suppose that?"

"Pardon me."

"Proud as a lucifer with all her sweetness," thought Sir Jasper, as Alison bowed haughtily, but no smile spread over the regular contour of her face.

"We have met before—at least, I remember now to have had the pleasure of seeing you," said he.

"When?"

"This very day."

"But where?"

"At the coiffeur's in the Rue des Tanneurs. I sat beside you, and saw your hair dressed, and lovely hair it is!"

"You sat beside me?"

"Yes, and watched you."

"Why?"

"I ought to apologise for making a lady's face a study; but need I say how deeply yours interested me?"

He was bending over her chair now in perfect confidence. He thought he had her in his power, and felt

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done.

Not that he thought there was much harm in "levanting with old Cadbury's girl;" it seemed rather a joke, in fact!

"Won't you take off your hat and sealskin before Lord Cadbury comes?" he urged, in a low voice.

"No—excuse me; and I shall not take them off after he does come."

"Why so? Will you sup with them on?"

"Yes—or I don't want supper at all."

"A deuced decided little party," thought Sir Jasper, who never took his *blasé* eyes off her.

"Where can Lord Cadbury be?" she exclaimed, impatiently, after the waiter had gone twice in search of him in vain.

"Can't say for the life of me. Are you anxious about him or yourself?"

"Myself, perhaps."

"Oh, be assured I shall take the greatest care of you," said Sir Jasper, noting with delight how perfect was the contour of her face, the form of her hands and ears.

"Thanks; but this situation is intolerable—he ought to be here."

"I wonder he doesn't look better after his property."

"What *do* you mean?" asked Alison, at this impudent remark. "I am not his property."

"Oh—a relation, perhaps."

"Not even a relation."

"And you came to Antwerp some weeks ago?"

"Yes."

"From Paris?"

"No; from Southampton in his yacht."

"In his yacht—oh, by Jove! what other ladies were of *his* party?" asked Sir Jasper, quizzically, while stroking his tawny moustache.

"No lady but me."

"In—deed!"

There was profound insolence in his drawl, yet Alison never suspected it.

Sir Jasper Dehorsey now believed that he might be as impudent as he chose; but the girl's manner nevertheless bewildered him.

"Why, sir, do you stare at me so?" she asked.

"May I not look at you?"

"Not as you do," she replied, with hauteur.

"You grudge me that pleasure?"

"I do not understand all this!" she exclaimed, as she started from her chair, and felt a difficulty in restraining her tears.

"Do be seated. If Cadbury does not appear in five minutes, I shall go in search of him."

"Or kindly get me a voiture to the Hôtel St. Antoine."

"So it is there they hang out," thought he. "Do you often go to the theatre?"

"Not now."

"Ah, you should see Antwerp when it is *en fête*."

"When is that?"

"In the carnival time." Then he continued: "And how do you like this city by the Scheldt?"

"Not at all," she replied, curtly.

"Indeed? You have been at the opera, of course?"

"No."

Or the picture galleries?"

"No."

"What! Have you not seen the Royal Museum, the antiquities at the Steyne, and the Musée Plantin-Moretus?"

"I have seen none of those things."

"Nor the splendid churches, and all the rest of it?"

"I have been nowhere," replied Alison, thinking sadly of her father's sick-bed.

"How this old snake has kept this lovely girl all to himself!" was the thought of Sir Jasper, in whose heart envy now mingled with exultation.

"How I should like to show you all these places, and Brussels, too!" said he at length.

"I have often heard of the Musée Plantin, with its quaint old rococo furniture and antique pictures—the old-world air of the place—its stillness and gloomy seclusion," said Alison.

"It is doocid slow. Still I should like to have the pleasure of showing it to you," said he again, stooping over her chair, but seeking even then to throw her off her guard. "The place itself is rather dark and gloomy with its high wainscots, oak carvings, ebony and ivory cabinets, faded tapestries, casement windows, and all the rest of it—said to be haunted by the ghosts of the funny old printers who lived there and printed the first Bible with old types which are yet there, and which it is said they come once a year at midnight to set up again, for the creak of the ancient presses is heard. But, be all that as it may, I don't know a more stunning place for a steady spoon or flirtation than the solemn old quadrangular Musée Plantin, with its suites of antique rooms, furnished with cushioned lounges, heavy curtains, and beds like tombs—like plumed hearses, or the old state-beds in Hampton Court—beds in which the dead Plantins slept three hundred years ago. By Jove, you must let me show you all that to-morrow. But as that duffer, old Cadbury, is so doocid long, had we not better

have supper without him? Shall I order the waiter to order it up?" he added, laying his hand upon the bell-rope, as if her assent would follow of course.

"Oh, no—no," exclaimed Alison, starting from her seat now in positive alarm at the idea of supping alone with a man whose name was unknown to her, and in whose watery, wicked eyes she was convinced there was an expression now there could be no mistaking.

"A glass of wine, then," he urged, suavely.

"You must excuse me."

"How shy you are! I can never imagine why any woman who is young and handsome need be shy."

"You know Lord Cadbury, of course," said Alison, suddenly.

"Intimately."

"May I ask your name?"

"Captain Smith," he replied, without a moment's hesitation.

"The world says queer things of old Cadbury."

"What do people say?"

"Well, people, of course, say anything but their prayers. So rough things are said of old Cad., as he is called. But never mind him; let us talk of ourselves, and don't look so uneasy. I assure you I am a perfect archangel of virtue, and have always laughed at love at first sight till—*now*," he said, in a manner so pointed that it made Alison's usually pale cheek flame. "What a deliciously fresh, unconventional, and lovely little darling you are!" he exclaimed, laying a hand upon her arm.

"Sir!"

"Hoity-toity! Come, it mustn't give itself little airs. Look at that pretty picture."

She gave it a glance. It was the production, doubtless, of some Parisian artist, and the subject made her tremble with fear and just anger.

She felt herself deeply insulted, and was now convinced that she had been ensnared. The blood of a hundred gallant Cheynes welled up in her heart, yet there was an expression of agony in her blue-gray eyes and on her blanched and quivering lips.

At that moment the door opened, and the waiter appeared with the supper tray. She formed her resolution quick as lightning, and acted upon it quite as quickly. Young, active, and half wild with terror, she darted from the room, nearly

knocking over Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, who was coming to enjoy his share of the little supper ordered by Sir Jasper, then down the staircase of the café, and out into the darkened streets, through which she fled like a hunted hare ; she knew not in what direction, nor did she care, provided that she was not overtaken by " Captain Smith " or his companion.

At that hour the streets of Antwerp are usually deserted by all save the gendarmes, and she had fled a considerable distance, conscious only that the snow was falling fast, before she stopped, quite out of breath, and began to think by what means she could reach the Hôtel St. Antoine, or get a voiture to convey her there.

She had run to the end of the Rue des Arquebusiers, and now before her opened on either hand the long and spacious street called the Place de Mer, in which the stately house of Rubens and the royal palace stand side by side.

Not a cab was to be seen, nor a gendarme ; the wind was keen, the snow falling heavily, and, like " Policeman X " and other guardians of the night, the gendarmes had betaken themselves to some cosy *estaminet*, or sought the hospitality of friendly kitchens and confiding cookmaids.

Which way was she to turn ? where seek aid or shelter ? She closed her little hands in terror and dismay, and, while shuddering with cold, suddenly a chorus burst upon her ear, and, before she could think which way to turn, a dozen of great fellows in kepis, blouses, and sabots, fresh from some *estaminet*, surrounded her, with shouts and mockery.

One put an arm round her and tried to kiss her, tearing away her veil ; but endued with strength beyond herself by the extremity of her terror, she dashed him back with both her hands.

" God help me ! " she exclaimed.

And hemming her in by a ring, they danced round her hand in hand, singing a song, which, as it was in Flemish and unknown to her, she supposed was something very ribald and horrible, yet it was only thus :

Hark to the sound
Of the fiddle and horn,
The dance and the song—
'Tis a festal morn.
Oh ! little they reckon of dull care
Or of sorrow ;
They laugh for the day,
Though they weep on the morrow.

"Ouf!" shouted one, "that would make a grand pendant to the *Zeike Jongeling*," referring to Jan Van Beers, the greatest lyric poet of the day.

"*Une blonde English mees—une nymphe—par'eu!*" cried one fellow.

"*Sommes-nous fantastiques? N'est-elle pas jolie?*" ("Isn't she pretty?") cried another.

"*Sur mon honneur, ma belle coquette!*" cried a third, making a clutch at her.

Others shouted strange things in Flemish, showing that they were boors or artisans, redolent of garlic, beer, and tobacco; but with a gasping sob of terror she broke away from them and fled again. She heard the clatter of sabots behind her, as some started in pursuit; but she was too swift for them, and the sound soon died away in the distance.

Along the dark and now silent streets she ran, close past the great doors of innumerable houses, as there are no areas or front garden plots in Antwerp, where the entrances open directly off the footpaths. Many a bell-handle and many a large knocker—lions' heads and bulls' heads as large as life—were within her reach; but, fearing to be roughly or coarsely repulsed, she dared touch neither.

She passed a church of vast height and colossal proportions—St. Jacques, though she knew it not—where Rubens lies under a slab of spotless white marble. There were few lamps in the streets in this quarter, and the oil lanterns before the Madonnas perched on stone brackets at the street corners, swung dimly and mournfully to and fro in the sleety and snowy wind. She felt an apparently mortal chill in her heart; her whole clothes were now soaked with sleet by her falling once or twice as she slipped.

Again she heard a tipsy chorus ringing out upon the night, and, in terror lest she was about to be overtaken by the roysterers from whom she had escaped, on finding herself near a great doorway in the Rue Rouge, as it eventually proved to be, she grasped the swinging handle of a bell and pulled it violently. She heard the sound of the bell respond at a distance, and, incapable of further endurance, before the door, which was a double one of great size, was opened, she had sunk down senseless, and lay huddled in a kind of heap upon the step of the house.

The last thing of which she was conscious was feeling the

hand of a man roughly and daringly searching her pockets, as he muttered with an oath :

“*Sacré !* not a *sou*—not a *centime !*”

CHAPTER XL.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THE morning was a clear, bright, sunny, and joyous one, the sun without cloud, the chimneys of Antwerp, as usual, without smoke, though the season was winter, and all its spires and countless crow-stepped gables were standing up clearly defined against a pure blue sky, when Bevil Goring, with high spirits, yet not without just emotions of great indignation, walked forth a free man from the place in which he had been detained, and, stepping into a voiture with his luggage, told the driver to take him to the Hôtel du Parc in the Place Verte, and kissed the ring of Alison which was on his finger again. He was free, and it had come about thus.

The papers and manifestoes found among his property were of so serious and compromising a nature that he was on the point of being transmitted with them to Brussels, but he contrived to employ an *avocat* (as an attorney or barrister is called there) in the Rue de l'Hôpital, who soon traced to the arrested Belgian workman those unlucky papers, and it chanced, oddly enough, that the mischievous Mr. Gaskins, having got a serious smash-up in an accident on the railway to Waterloo, believing himself to be dying, made a full confession of the trick he had played to serve a lucrative master ; and the Belgian authorities, duly aware at last of Goring's rank and position in society, confessed their haste and mistake, and, “with a million pardons,” released him from an arrest that, after it had extended to some days, was nearly making him frantic, and he was welcomed and ushered to his former apartment at the hotel by the waiter Jacquot, though Maître Jean Picot, remembering his arrest, had some unpleasant doubts about receiving him.

Bevil, however, lost no time in repairing to the Hôtel St. Antoine, resolved to see Sir Ranald—Alison too, if possible, if it was not too late ; but he was rather unprepared for the

state of affairs that awaited him there. Meeting the *concierge* or hall-porter at the door, he asked with some anxiety if Sir Ranald Cheyne was still there.

"Oui, monsieur," replied the porter, saluting in a military fashion.

"And Miss Cheyne?"

"Non, monsieur."

The reply sank deep in Goring's heart, and he was perplexed when the official at the same time mysteriously shook his head and shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory expression in his face.

"Is Lord Cadbury here?"

"Milord is out also," was the reply.

"Also—then they are together!" thought Goring. "Take up my card to Sir Ranald, and ask if he will receive me."

It was taken up by a waiter, who returned promptly to report, in Continental parlance, that "Sir Cheyne desired him to walk up."

Much depended upon the issue of this visit if Alison was still free. He had come frankly, freely, to urge humbly his suit again, backed by the undoubted wealth which had flowed upon him since they last met at Chilcote.

He found Sir Ranald in a handsome apartment, seated in an easy-chair, but looking pale, thin, and worn. He made no offer of his hand, as with both he grasped the arms of the chair, tremulous with rage, while his eyes glared like those of a rattlesnake through the glasses of his *pince-nez* at his unexpected visitor, who scarcely knew how or where to begin, and looked nervously round him for some evidence of the recent presence of Alison, but saw nothing.

"Permit me to congratulate you, Sir Ranald——" he began.

"On what?" asked the other, savagely.

"On the escape from death by drowning which we were all led to suppose you and Miss Cheyne had suffered."

"I don't want your congratulations; and, so far as Miss Cheyne is concerned, your appearance in Antwerp sufficiently accounts for her mysterious disappearance."

Utter bewilderment, in which emotions of dismay, fear, and anger coursed through his mind, tied the tongue of Bevil Goring—dismay and fear he knew not of what, and anger lest this was some fresh trickery of Lord Cadbury.

"Mysterious disappearance !" he faltered.

"Your conduct, Captain Goring, has been shamefully deceitful—most dishonourable !" exclaimed Sir Ranald, in a broken but still enraged tone.

"How ?"

"You came to my house at Chilcote a welcome guest, then you stole the affections of my daughter. You have followed her to Antwerp with plans best known to yourself ; and where—oh, where—is she now ?"

"Sir Ranald !" expostulated Goring, piteously, and feeling his face grow pale.

"Talk not to me !" resumed Sir Ranald, in his tone of fury again ; "every silly girl thinks she is in love, or that she must love the first man who says he loves her."

These strange utterances made Goring half forget the errand on which he had come, and utterly forget the fortuitous but fortunate wealth which would, he hoped, have made that errand perhaps successful.

"Vile trickster, you shall answer to me for all the mischief you have wrought !" exclaimed Sir Ranald, breaking the silence that had ensued, though, if glances could kill, Goring's earthly career had ended there and then. "We are in Belgium, and, old as I am, I shall cover you with a pistol at twelve paces, even if I should be propped against a post—by heaven, I shall ! Do you hear me, sir ?"

"You are very wrong, Sir Ranald, to address me thus," said Goring, gravely and sadly ; "and, though you might level ten pistols at me, God forbid that I should level one at you—the father of her I have come so far to seek, and, if I understand your terrible words, apparently in vain."

"Don't speak of my daughter, sir, and don't attempt to humbug me !" thundered Sir Ranald, almost beside himself with rage and weakness. "Bah !" he added scornfully, "to follow her here was pleasanter and safer work than fighting the Ashantees. Will you meet me at any time or place—we may select to-morrow ?"

"For what purpose ?"

"Can you ask ? To fight me."

"Absurd—I shall not."

"You will not ?"

"No."

"Coward !"

"You are mad, Sir Ranald, to address me, a tried soldier, thus injuriously," said Goring, more sadly than bitterly. "I have won my Victoria Cross," he added, striking his breast, "by no solitary act of rashness, but by acknowledged proofs of disciplined courage; and my name has an echo still on the north-east frontier of India."

"Coward," hissed the old man's voice again, as he looked round for some missile to throw at the head of his visitor, who, seeing it was useless to protract an interview so painful and terrible, at once withdrew, and the fierce mocking laughter—and strange laughter it was—of Sir Ranald jarred sorely on his ear as he did so.

His head was in a whirl—what was to be done? The old man's anger and epithets he pardoned; but from his utterances he gathered that Alison was abducted or absent, and that *he* was supposed to be the author of the mystery that now filled him with terror and anxiety.

When was she missed? Had she been decoyed from the hotel, or abducted in the street, and how long since?

On these points the *concierge*, on having a couple of five-franc pieces deftly slipped into his palm, soon enlightened him.

She had gone one night with Lord Cadbury to the Théâtre des Variétés, and milord had come home without her in great terror and dismay, all search had proved unavailing, even the ponds in the park of the Avenue Rubens had been dragged in vain till the ice came.

"How long is it since she disappeared?"

"A week ago, monsieur."

A mortal terror smote the heart of Goring as he listened; but rage greatly took its place when the *concierge*, with apparent sympathy, referred to the dismay and anxiety of Milord Cadbury.

This Goring deemed but trickery to cover some act of deceit he had perpetrated, and terribly did the as yet baffled lover resolve to punish it; but he was rather surprised at first by the manner in which he was suddenly accosted by Cadbury, who now by chance entered the vestibule of the hotel in which several waiters were loitering, and, with all an Englishman's genuine horror of a "scene," made an effort to keep his temper.

As if following suit with Sir Ranald, the peer, who now connected Alison's disappearance with Goring's liberty, though

the dates did not tally, said to him haughtily, and in a low tone :
"So, Captain Goring, it seems to have pleased you to follow my intended wife."

"Your intended wife !"

"Miss Cheyne of Essilmont, to this place—to Antwerp, and that you have forced yourself upon her as soon as you had the opportunity of finding her alone. By heavens, you must have watched her steps closely."

"Shuffler and juggler !" exclaimed Goring, in his rage becoming as furious in his speech as Sir Ranald.

"May I ask your reason for daring to apply these epithets to me ?" asked Cadbury, reddening with passion to the tips of his coarse, hairy ears.

"I shall give them to you on the ramparts of the citadel, in the Champ de Manœuvres, or anywhere else you choose."

"Are you engaged in a melodrama, without a musical accompaniment ?" asked Cadbury with a sneer.

"You will find it terribly real, I promise you."

"Braggadocio !—behind the age. Bah ! people don't fight duels now."

"Cads and Cadburys, perhaps."

"Permit me to pass," said the peer, assuming what he thought an air of dignity that only made his vulgar little figure look more absurd.

"Not until I am fully answered," replied Goring, resolutely barring his way.

"Of your past intentions, Captain Goring, we——"

"Who are *we* ?"

"Sir Ranald and myself."

"Well ?"

"Of your past intentions we have an idea ; but what are your present ?"

"To discover her, and carry her off," replied Goring, passionately.

"You know but too well where she is ; but I don't understand why you come brawling in my hotel. *Concierge*, get a gendarme, and have this fellow expelled."

"Will you meet me ?" asked Goring, in a low and concentrated voice.

"Most certainly not. No man of honour is obliged to go out with a man who has been in the hands of the gendarmerie and inside a prison."

This recalled the story of the "papers," and roused Goring's blood to boiling heat.

He suddenly, to the mingled amusement and dismay of the *concierge* and group of wondering waiters, made a brisk manual application to the nose of my Lord Cadbury, which he took between the first and second fingers of his right hand, and therewith administered such a wrench as made the "hereditary legislator" dance with rage and pain.

"Now," thought Goring, as he flung a card at Cadbury's feet, and strode into the broad and sunlit Place Verte, "he must come out, or the devil is in it!"

Little did either know how completely they were all at *cross purposes*!

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CHALLENGE.

BEVIL GORING had latterly from various sources heard much of Cadbury's general character, which fully bore out the opinions expressed of him by the two *vauriens*, who were quite as unscrupulous—to wit, Sir Jasper Dehorsey and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, and like him, knew many of "the soiled doves that flutter from tree to tree in the forest of St. John, or build their nests in Brompton groves."

"The union of January and May is so common now-a-days," says the author of "Barren Honour," "that no one thinks of inditing epithalamia thereon, satiric or otherwise." But that Alison could be in any way a party to the trickery of which the wealthy Cadbury was quite capable, was not for a moment to be imagined, as she idolised her father, with all his defects of temper and character, and would never leave him a prey to doubt and anxiety, though at present these emotions rather took the form of parental indignation. So what then was to be thought?

Where could she be secluded, and under what circumstances concealed from her father, whose bearing, however offensive to Goring, seemed genuine—the result of conviction? As for Cadbury, Goring misdoubted him, and believed him acting out a *rôle*, by which he had imposed upon Sir Ranald.

He had not the shadow of a doubt of Alison's strength of

mind and purity of purpose, yet pressure often achieved much. Her father was evidently ignorant of her whereabouts, and if Cadbury had her on board his yacht, now anchored out in the stream below the Tête de Flandres (which was not impossible), *how* had she been taken there, and by whom?

Had she been drugged, stupefied, or what? Such things are read of in the public papers every day.

The position was well calculated to fill the mind with perplexity and anxiety, anger and indignation; and thus that of Bevil Goring was a species of chaos!

If Goring actually had Alison with him, why did he act the part he did—why come before him at all? was the thought of Sir Ranald, who missed her sweet presence and gentle ministrations painfully and fearfully.

If Cadbury had her in enforced concealment, what was his purpose in playing the part he did to Sir Ranald? thought Goring; anyhow, a bullet planted in the well-fed person of the noble peer might tend or lead to the revelation of all that, and atone for Goring's recent detention in the Rue des Beguines, so he thirsted almost savagely for the hour of a hostile meeting such as never could take place in the England of the present day.

That Cadbury should utterly disbelieve him was a matter of course, as it was a point with that personage never to believe sincerely in any one, or that anyone ever did a single thing without an interested motive. At home he was a man who was arrogant among his equals, a tyrant among his dependants and inferiors, and was the terror of every poacher for thirty miles round Cadbury Court. So his reputation was not a pleasant one.

In coming to Antwerp, Goring had learned one great fact, that she was alive; that she had not perished in the collision at sea; but suppose that, from subsequent circumstances, it were better that the waves had closed over her? or suppose no trace of her were ever to be discovered in any way—that she had disappeared out of the world, as it were? Such things happen even in London; so why not on the continent of Europe? But he thrust these ideas aside as too horrible for contemplation, and bent his whole thoughts to the duel, which he never doubted must come off now, and speedily, after the terrible affront he had put upon Cadbury, in presence of the Flemish servants at the Hôtel St. Antoine.

If it took place, Alison's name, at all hazards, must be kept out of the story, which would be sure to find its way into every "Society" paper in London, and he shrank from the fear of her being made the subject of hack gossip, which is ever cynical or worse.

Goring waited all that day at the Hôtel du Parc, expecting some messenger from Lord Cadbury; and he waited a considerable portion of the next; but none came; so he bethought him of sending one on his own account.

He had not a single friend in Antwerp; but during those two days, while at breakfast and other meals at the *table d'hôte* he had sat next an officer of the Belgian artillery, with whom—in the freemasonry of soldiering—he speedily became intimate, for all soldiers have a thousand interests, sympathies, and topics in common.

Captain Victor Gabion was a handsome fellow, about thirty years of age, with an antique style of head and face, his cheeks a clear olive tint, dark moustache, and keen eye—handsome we say, but of a rare type; a little effeminate, perhaps, but not the less attractive for that. He had a suavity and sweetness of manner. His form was well knit; he was square-shouldered, singularly slender in the waist—but that is affected by all Belgian officers, and as a captain of artillery when in undress wore a gold aiguillette on the left shoulder, with cords across the breast.

Full of his own thoughts and terrible anxieties, Bevil Goring was not much in a mood for talking about anything; but the general *bonhomie* of Victor Gabion was very attractive and infectious, and so they rapidly became intimate; but we are told that "there are times when a man must speak—even to a dog or his worst enemy—rather than keep silence altogether."

No message seemed likely to come from Cadbury, so to kill time Goring had accompanied his new friend to the artillery quarters at the Caserne des Prédicateurs, in the street of the name, and so called from being built, no doubt, on the site of an old Dominican convent.

There is a strong family likeness in all barracks, but to Goring's English eyes the brick-floored rooms, the bare brick walls looked strange; so did the batteries of bronzed guns, drawn up wheel to wheel in the square, the meagre onion soup conveyed to the messes in buckets, and the slovenly soldiers in long-skirted dark blue coats with red worsted epaulettes, and

buttons (*à la* Childers) without numbers on them; and ever and anon he felt a shiver when he heard their trumpet calls—the calls with which he had become so familiar during his sojourn in the adjacent prison, in the Rue des Beguines, only two hundred metres distant.

“And your regiment, monsieur,” asked Gabion, “where is it?”

“We have battalions in India, in Ireland, and one is now, or shall soon be in Ashanti,” replied Goring.

“Ah, *Sapristi*! how I should like to serve in distant lands and colonies!”

“Belgium must first get them,” thought Goring. And on returning to the hotel, finding that there was still no message from Cadbury, as his patience was utterly exhausted, he confided in his new friend Gabion.

“I have had an unpleasant affair with a countryman of mine, a Lord Cadbury, who is now at the Hôtel St. Antoine; and as I have no intimate friend in Antwerp,” said he, “will you, as an officer—a brother soldier—arrange for a meeting between us?”

The Belgian tugged his dark moustaches, and hesitated, muttering, of course, the inevitable “*Sapristi*!”

“You understand?” said Goring.

“Perfectly; but *mon ami*, I don’t like duels. I was engaged in one once, and the terrible memory of the part I had to play in it haunts me still. What is this quarrel about?”

“A lady—a lady whose name must at all hazards be kept out of it.”

“Then no apology will suffice?”

“None. And you will oblige me?”

“With pleasure,” replied the Belgian, as he buckled on his sword, leisurely lit a cigarette and crossed the open, sunny space of the Place Verte, went to the hotel indicated and sent up his card, which, in Belgian fashion, was twice the size of an English one, and bore his name in large letters,

VICTOR GABION,
Capitaine d’Artillerie,

with the letters E. L. V., signifying “En la Ville;” and after some delay, he was ushered into the room of Lord Cadbury, whom he found in a rich *robe de chambre* tied with silk cords, and wearing an elaborate smoking-cap. He laid his cigar on

the stove, near which he was standing, and tried to eye his visitor superciliously, and to the acute eyes of the latter his large feet, coarse hands and ears, looked rather strange in an English peer; but he inherited them with the Alderman's money, and they showed the plebeian drop in his blood, as also did his love for trinkets and personal adornment.

"You call yourself Captain Victor Gabion of the Belgian Artillery," said he, glancing at the card, and tossing it beside his cigar.

"I *am* Captain Victor Gabion, of the Belgian Artillery," replied the officer, quietly.

"And what do you want with me? I have not the honour of your acquaintance," said Cadbury, having all the while a perfect intuition of his visitor's purpose.

"I am here in the interest of Captain Bevil Goring, of Her Britannic Majesty's service, and monsieur must know with what views."

"Haven't the slightest idea," yawned Cadbury, yet nervously, as he resumed his cigar.

"Well, it is to arrange an hour and place for a mutual meeting, with swords, or pistols more probably."

"Oh, indeed. Very kind and considerate of you to take such interest in my affairs; but I don't suppose, Captain—what's your name?—oh, ah, Victor Gabion—that a peer of the realm was, even of old, when such things were in fashion, obliged to go out with a commoner, nor am I with this fellow, who, as you no doubt know, was but recently in the hands of your authorities. Moreover, people don't fight duels now."

"In England, so I believe, but monsieur is in Belgium."

"D——n Belgium, I am not likely to forget that."

"If monsieur adopts this tone to me, I shall have the pleasure of a little turn with him after."

"After what?" asked Cadbury, with dilated eyes.

"After Captain Goring's affair is over."

"The devil you will!" exclaimed the peer, greatly ruffled.

"*Sapristi*—yes."

Pleasant this! thought Lord Cadbury; two duels in prospect after all his schemes, and "no end" of money, and Alison slipped through his fingers after all!

"Monsieur will refer me to a friend?" said the Belgian, who waited quietly a little time for him to speak, standing, too, for he had never been offered a chair.

"A friend—for what purpose?" asked Cadbury, savagely.

"To arrange with me for you and Captain Goring."

Cadbury felt fairly cornered, and compelled to affect a virtue which he did not possess.

"If monsieur has no friend in Antwerp, one of my brother officers will, I have no doubt, be happy to act for him."

"Thanks, very much—what a considerate lot you are, you Belgians! Never mind about a friend—I'll get one if I want him—name your time and place."

"Shall we say eight o'clock to-morrow morning, at the citadel?"

"All right—I am your man!"

"In the Lunette St. Laurent, monsieur?"

"Very good."

"Swords or pistols, monsieur?"

"Oh, the devil—pistols, of course," replied Cadbury, as if he was in the habit of fighting a duel every morning.

"Merci, monsieur; we shall not fail you, and now good evening—bon soir."

"Bon soir."

The manner of Captain Gabion, who had been eyeing him with some contempt, twirling his moustache the while, changed completely now, and, bowing with studious politeness, he withdrew to report progress to Bevil Goring.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN THE LUNETTE ST. LAURENT.

AT first a kind of—shall we say it?—savage joy and exultation swelled up in the breast of Goring at the prospect of being face to face with Cadbury again, and already in fancy he was covering with his pistol the spectrum of the peer's thick-set, pudgy person, for he had at first serious doubts—though they were both on the Continent—that the latter would accept his challenge.

"Well, I have faced much in my short time, and figured in many things; but I never thought to do so in such an old-fashioned affair as a duel!" he said, with a grim smile, to his new friend Gabion.

And he wondered what Tony Dalton, Jerry Wilmot, and others of the battalion now far away beyond the equator, would think of the event, when tidings would reach them that he had been shot by Lord Cadbury, or had shot the latter—and in a duel!

How strange it sounded to English ears now!

He wrote to his solicitors to settle a sum stated—a handsome annuity on Alison, if she was found—one that would keep her every way independent alike of her father and Lord Cadbury, if he fell by the hand of the latter—instructions which made those quiet and very acute legal practitioners, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, and Scrawly, open their eyes very wide indeed when the letter reached them at Gray's Inn Square.

His reveries were not very rose-coloured, as he might be a dead man long before *this* time to-morrow, he thought, while looking at the clock; however, it did not impair his appetite, and he and Victor Gabion spent the evening at the Café Grisor, in the Rue Von Shoonhoven, listening to the grand organ which is played by machinery, while enjoying their wine and cigars, far into the small hours of the morning.

Yet we may be sure that there are few men, if they told truth, but would acknowledge that they felt a very unpleasant emotion when thinking that when another round of the clock was achieved their part in this world might be over—ended and done with!

In the morning he was in a brighter mood, and, though infuriated against Cadbury, had no desire to kill, but only to wound him, to the end that he might wring from him the secret of what he done with Alison. He was a good marksman—had been a musketry instructor—and with rifle and revolver had done some great things among the big game and hill tribes in India.

A revelation was all he wanted. On his own life, save in so far as Alison Cheyne was concerned, he set little store. How short seemed the minutes he used to spend with her under the old beeches at Chilcote, or when in Laura Dalton's at the Grange—short and few, and how much alone he used to feel when not with her!

Now how much more alone he felt, when he seemed to have so mysteriously and painfully lost her!

After some coffee, backed by a *chasse*—i.e., dashed with

cognac—he and Gabion, with the latter's case of pistols, departed before sunrise in a voiture for the citadel—a pretty long drive, through winding and tortuous streets, crossing between the great shipping basins at the Quai Hambourg, and ere long the houses were left behind, and the great grassy embankments of the fortress rose before them.

Every feature of the scenery, every detail of what he saw, however petty and trivial, impressed itself curiously upon the mind of Bevil Goring on this eventful morning.

A group of old peasant women, with wide dark-blue or black cloaks and coal-scuttle bonnets, gossiping in the roadway; children at cottage doors; Flemish labourers, with hard and earnest types of face, leisurely filling their huge pipes with tobacco; a boy sitting on a gate, munching a straw, and dreaming perhaps of the future; the view of the vast Scheldt, curving in a mighty sweep round the flat green Tête de Flandres, with all its steamers and other shipping.

The mighty cathedral spire, and all the thousands of high-peaked roofs and masses of the quaint city, thrown forward in dark outline against the lurid and vapoury red of the winter morning sky, all seen like a vast panorama from the green heights of the citadel. Goring recalled the first morning he had seen the latter from the deck of the *Rotterdam*, and had looked at its great gaping embrasures and lunettes, well flanked out, with the leisurely interest it cannot fail to have in a soldier's eye.

He was now perhaps looking upon Nature, with all her beauties, for the last time, and the coming spring and summer might be as naught to him, even after the wealth that had come upon him so unexpectedly; but if he was fated to fall by Cadbury's pistol his chief regret was not for these things, but the fear that, unless those in another world are cognisant of what passes in this, he would never know the fate of Alison Cheyne, or penetrate the veil that hid her whereabouts in mystery now!

He listened somewhat as one in a dream to Victor Gabion, who was drawing his attention, with no small pride and enthusiasm, to the features of the mighty model citadel, which is now so deserted in aspect, and the streets in the immediate vicinity of which consist chiefly of the ruins of the arsenals and magazines, that were destroyed in the great siege of 1832, when only 4,500 Dutchmen, under old General Chassé, defended

themselves with such desperation against 55,000 Frenchmen, under Marshal Gerard.

"My grandfather commanded a regiment on that occasion," said Gabion, "and opened the ball by attacking this part—the Lunette St. Laurent, which lies nearest to the town. The trenches were nine English miles long, and sixty-three thousand shot and shell were fired into the place before Chassé hauled down his colours. *Sapristi!* but that was something like fighting! *Diable!*" he added, "we are *not* first on the ground."

Bevil Goring was much mortified to think that in that matter he had been anticipated by Lord Cadbury, when some dark figures appeared hurrying towards them along the *terre pleine* of the ramparts; but it was not so, for those who approached proved to be brother-officers of Gabion's, who, having been informed by him of the affair, had come forth, as one said, to see "le sport."

All touched their caps, and, after a few passing remarks, looked round for the appearance of Cadbury and his second, but no one, *save* themselves, seemed to be in the misty space, or amid the wet grassy works of the citadel, and no voiture from the town was as yet seen approaching the entrance to it. All these Belgian officers, to Goring's eye, seemed very square-shouldered, as they wore blue cloaks over their gold epaulettes. All were chatting and laughing merrily, while smoking as if their lives depended upon it.

"*Sapristi! Sacré Dieu!*" muttered Victor Gabion, looking at his watch, "ten minutes past eight, and no appearance of milord."

Time passed on. The cathedral clock struck half-past eight, and eventually nine; but there was no appearance of Cadbury.

"Can he have fallen ill?" was the last of many surmises as to this most unexpected turn in the matter.

"Not likely; he would surely have had the courtesy to send a message, and not keep us loitering here," said Captain Gabion.

The Belgians twirled their moustaches, and exchanged glances of derision.

Bevil Goring felt keen shame that any Englishman should act as Cadbury had done, and at last they all left the citadel and drove back to the city.

"*Sapristi!*" was of course muttered by everyone; "what is to be done now?"

Goring thought, if he could meet his lordship, he would certainly attack him rearward with his foot, and, as Hudibras has it :

Because a kick in *that* place more
Hurts honour than deep wounds before.

At the very time that Goring and his companions were cooling their heels on the Lunette St. Laurent, the *Firefly* was steering close-hauled against a head wind, midway between the city and Flushing, with Lord Cadbury on board ! Since coming there he had imbibed in his wrath and tribulation of spirit so many of Pemmican's brandies and sodas that Tom Llanyard was puzzled what to think, and his temper was horrible.

On the preceding afternoon, immediately after the departure of Victor Gabion, he had gone to the telegraph-office near the Bourse, and telegraphed a message to *himself* that he might confidently open it in the presence of Sir Ranald Cheyne. This he accordingly did, and, saying nothing of his recent visitor's purpose, he suddenly announced that he must instantly depart for London by steamer and train, but he hoped that Sir Ranald, whom he left alone in his misery, would telegraph to his club the moment he heard tidings of Alison, on which he, Lord Cadbury, would instantly return to Antwerp. And, after this, the hereditary legislator (by one descent) took his hurried departure.

Goring and his new friend Gabion, by making inquiries, were not long in discovering that he had sailed in his yacht. Could Alison, under any circumstances, be on board that yacht too ?

His departure so suddenly, if no puzzle to Goring, was certainly one to Sir Ranald, upon whose acceptance the peer pressed a little cheque for any present necessities, and he was just then sick of the whole affair.

Bevil Goring could go near Sir Ranald no more, but, as he loitered near the hotel, could he have looked in upon him just then he would have forgiven him, and more than forgiven him all his passion and fury.

"A letter for you, Sir Cheyne," the *concierge* had said.

It was in a lady's hand, foreign in style, and addressed to "Sir Ranald Cheyne, Hôtel St. Antoine, E.L.V." He opened it, and read the contents in tremulous haste.

"Ailie—my own bird, Ailie—it is about her, but *what* ?"

he exclaimed, as his old eyes filled with salt tears. Then he covered his face with his hands, and added hoarsely: "Oh, my child, my darling Ailie!"

He strove to rise from his chair, but fell faintly into the arms of the startled *concierge*.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE MARCH TO PRAH.

AND now, while Bevil Goring is lingering somewhat hopelessly in Antwerp, hearing nothing of Alison, and with all aim apparently taken out of his life, feeling how terrible is the unknown; and Laura Dalton and Bella Chevenix are counting the days of separation from those they love—the long-lost husband in one case, the misjudged lover in the other—the transport, with the Rifles on board, was running along the western coast of Africa, and some twenty days or so after the departure from Southampton saw her, with the rest of the sea and land armament, at anchor off the Gold Coast.

Save in so far as it concerns the adventures and fate of our friends Tony Dalton and Jerry Wilmot, we do not intend to write the story of how we fought there and marched to Coomassie, or what was the cause of the war, as there are never wanting old soldiers to tell the true tale of the fields in which they have fought.

Sir Richard Steele, that pleasing old essayist, in one of his fugitive papers gives us an amusing account of an ordinary in Holborn, where a veteran captain, furnished with a wooden leg, was never weary of telling long stories about the battle of Naseby, in which he had borne a part; and it is always the result of every battle or campaign of note to have survivors of it, who become perhaps after-dinner bores.

Thus the veterans of Blenheim and Malplaquet would hear with impatience the terrors of the great Civil War, but inflicted their reminiscences in turn on the victors of Dettingen and Culloden. So in turn the heroes of the glorious Peninsula have now given place to those of Alma and Inkerman, and even their annals are fading now beside those of the luckless and disastrous fields of Southern Africa.

"The army is full of men with stories in their lives," said Dalton to Jerry one day, when talking of this very subject ; "but I think, by Jove, that mine is an exceptionally strange one."

Jerry, on the other hand, was thinking it strange that he should have proposed to his friend's *wife*; but that fancy was all a thing of the past now, and—when his genuine love for Bella Chevenix was considered—seemed a phantasy, an absurdity, out of which the brilliant Laura had herself laughed him, and he had ceased to think of her before he ever thought hopefully of winning Bella ; but surely love in these days of ours is not what it was a hundred years ago, when, as the author of "Guy Livingstone" has it, "our very school-girls smile at the love-conceits which beguiled their grand-dames, even as *they* may have smiled at the philandering of Arcadia."

New Year's Day, 1874, was to witness the landing of Sir Garnet Wolseley's expedition—army it could not be called—on the Gold Coast, consisting in all of about fifteen hundred men, exclusive of officers. The Black Watch—clad in grey for the first time since the regiment first mustered on the Birks of Aberfeldy, a hundred and forty years before—reckoned only nine hundred bayonets, nominally, with the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers and the Rifles formed the infantry. The pipers alone wore the kilt.

Long before daybreak the Rifles came ashore. The seamen of the ships of war and transports were supplied with lanterns, in case the landing should occur in the dark ; but a brilliant moon, shining in a clear, blue, cloudless sky, rendered their use unnecessary, and the dark grey column, with its black accoutrements and tropical helmets, was soon massed on the beach, and began its march alone under Colonel Arthur Warren—a veteran of Alma and the Eastern campaign—and long ere the sun of the tropical noon was high overhead, had marched seven miles on its route to the front ; the rest of the troops, with the Naval Brigade, came on within five or six days, and the advance was continued towards the Prah. The troops did not—as the people at home curiously expected—proceed towards that now famous river by *railway*, as the materials which were brought out for its construction were not laid down, so "that wondrous jungle, with its foot-track, some twenty or thirty inches wide, between close walls of luxuriant greenery, swarming with strange and lovely birds. hateful reptiles, and monstrous insects, was

not as yet to be disturbed by the locomotives steaming and screaming across the land."

The troops marched without music. The pipes alone at times—playing the warlike airs of other ages—woke the echoes of the path to Coomassie, scaring the turkey buzzards, the scavenger bird, and others of the feathered tribes in the far recesses of the dense primeval forests.

But there were some parts of the route where it lay through still and lifeless dells like those in the south of Scotland, without shelter, and then the fierce sun of Africa shone upon them with its pitiless glare, till rifle-barrels and sword-blades grew hot to the touch, and, like many others, Jerry Wilmot and Dalton sighed as they thought of iced champagne, of bitter beer "in its native pewter" (as Dickens has it), and the flesh-pots of Aldershot.

But anon, near Accrofal, the march lay through groves of cotton-trees some two hundred and fifty feet high, like the giant vegetation of another world—trees with stems like the Duke of York's column, as Sir Garnet Wolseley afterwards said—shutting out the sun from the wilderness of bush below; and, as trees of other kinds were already shedding leaves, the men often marched more than ankle-deep through fallen foliage.

The desertion of five thousand Fantee burden-bearers threw their task on the troops, who—the 42nd setting the example—carried the stores, in addition to their kits, arms, and accoutrements, with seventy rounds of ball cartridge, three ball-bags, haversacks, belts, bayonet, and Snider-Enfield rifle—terrible toil for white men in such a climate.

At each halting-place food was cooked by men in advance, and whenever a half-battalion came in it was fed at once, and the cooks went forward to the next. Jerry's man, O'Farrel, was "invaluable as an improviser of grub," as Jerry said, though his *cuisine* was somewhat inferior to the luxuries of the transport mess.

The first halt on New Year's night was at a place called Barraco, of which a party of the Naval Brigade were the first to possess themselves, and there they were as hearty and happy as British soldiers could be, as the whole campaign in the bush seemed to them but a spree ashore. But they were chiefly in their glory at night, when an enormous camp fire was kindled by them—a fire upon which the absolute and

entire trunks of trees were heaped—throwing its flames skyward and its red light far into the recesses and dingles of the untrodden forest.

So on New Year's night, in that strange and isolated spot, were gathered the general and his staff, the sailors and their officers, and all made merry—the blue-jackets stepping forth in succession to sing their best, and often raciest, forecastle songs.

On the next day's march, the second of January, the advanced guard raised a cheer.

"What's up?" asked Dalton—"the Ashantees in sight?"

"No," replied an officer, "but the Prah is—that famous river which they believe no white man will ever be able to cross."

Nevertheless, it was crossed that evening—the first man who stemmed its current being Lieutenant William Grant, of the 6th Regiment. It is sometimes called the Boosemprah, or river of St. John.

Swift and muddy-coloured, here it was rolling with great force between banks that were almost perpendicular—it was seventy yards wide and nine feet deep. The foliage on the banks was singularly beautiful, and there the stupendous cotton-trees were towering high in the air above a rich undergrowth of palms and plantains.

The troops crossed it by a pontoon bridge, and a trimly-hutted camp for three thousand men was speedily formed by the engineers, and then tents were pitched for Sir Garnet and his staff. Near them were parked the artillery under Captain Rait. It consisted of two batteries of steel guns, rifled muzzle-loaders, with one capable of throwing a seven-pound shell, or an oblong twelve-pound shell—sources of unutterable terror to Ashantees. There was also a multiplying Gatling gun for musketry.

It was here that letters came from Koffee, the barbarous Ashantee king, expressive of a desire for peace, but not on such terms as the general could grant after having come so far; thus the advance on Coomassie, the capital, was still resolved on. The only written language of the people is Arabic, and the only persons who can write it are Moors; but their verbal language is the softest and most liquid on the Gold Coast, abounding in vowels and nearly destitute of aspirates.

The black and nearly nude ambassadors remained in camp

for a brief time, and one of them, on seeing the practice of the Gatling gun, which sent streams of bullets in every direction to which its muzzle was turned, told his colleagues that "it was vain to fight against foes so terribly armed."

On this they taunted him with cowardice, of which they threatened to inform King Koffee, and knowing what his doom would be, the unfortunate creature shot himself, and was buried on his own side of the river, when each Ashantee, in accordance with some ancient custom, threw a handful of dust on his body and took his departure.

It was evident that there would soon be fighting now. "Sir Garnet's demands were that the king must release all European prisoners (of whom he had several), pay £200,000 for the cost of the war, and sign in presence of our forces a treaty securing firmly the British Protectorate from future aggression. Private warnings, however, and the information gained by Lord Gifford and Major Russell in their scouting advance beyond the Prah, caused Sir Garnet to distrust completely all the king's overtures for peace."

On the night after the dusky ambassadors had departed, Tony Dalton had command of an out-piquet in the direction of the enemy, and as the sunset passed away he had, as in duty bound, examined carefully all the ground in his vicinity.

A night piquet, especially in a wood and in a savage country, is always a post of danger. By day sentries can see about them more or less, but not so in the gloom of night and in a jungly wilderness where savages might creep upon them unawares—even past or between them—and cut the piquet off. Hence no man thought of sleeping, and Dalton had at least one connecting sentry on the narrow track that led to the front where his line was posted.

The pipers of the Black Watch, playing tattoo in the hutted camp had made the mighty woods of the Prah re-echo to the notes of the "Pibroch of Donuil Dhu," its last notes had died away in the leafy dingles, and as silence stole over the plain Dalton gave way to thought.

The war in which he was engaged had been stigmatised as one against savages, but they were savages who were far from being feeble foes; and if (as a print of the time said) "by honour and glory is meant the creditable performance of duty at the call of the State, then is that just as applicable to soldiers and sailors who fight savages as to those engaged in the more

showy scenes of European war. Her Majesty's troops do not pick and choose either the enemies they have to encounter or the regions wherein their valour and fortitude are to be displayed; and it is unjust to shower laurels on one set of men, while another, equally employed in defending our empire, are deprived of due recognition."

It was with a consciousness of this—the high sense of duty—that our troops landed cheerfully on the perilous Gold Coast; yet Dalton, like many of his comrades, had been elsewhere engaged in "the big wars that make ambition virtue," and he felt that this Ashanti strife, though a petty one, was fraught with many dangers peculiar to itself. Would he escape them, and yet be spared to enjoy the society of the now brilliant and beautiful Laura and their sweet little daughter? How hard if the bullet of a naked savage deprived him of that double joy, and gave him a grave amid the eternal forest that spread from the Prah to Coomassie!

He tried to shun this thought—that almost *fear*, which came to his naturally gallant spirit—but failed. It *would* come again and again, with a persistency that troubled him; for life seemed dearer, sweeter now, than it had ever been before. He never thought of sleep, but indulged in waking dreams of scenes and faces far away in pleasant Hampshire, and in hopes that the wild work would soon be over, and hideous Coomassie won.

The night wind was whispering among rushes and reeds of wondrous growth, or stirring the foliage of the cotton-trees, between which could be seen the stars—constellations unknown in our northern hemisphere; and he could hear the ripple of the Prah as it poured between its banks on its way to St. Sebastian, the chirp of enormous insects, the twitter of brilliantly plumaged birds, scared by the red gleams of the watch-fire. Round the latter were the men of the piquet, in their gray uniforms and tropical helmets, in groups, sitting or lying beside their piled rifles, the barrels of which reflected the sheen of the flames.

As Dalton looked and listened, he felt as one in a dream, amid surroundings so strange, and far over the seas his heart seemed to go, to where, no doubt, at that hour little Netty, his daughter—*his daughter*, how strangely it sounded!—was sleeping by her mother's side, "like a callow cygnet in its nest"—Netty so recently found, one of whose existence he had been so long ignorant.

The two tresses of hair he had got in such hot haste at Southampton were many a time drawn forth from the breast-pocket of his patrol-jacket, to be tenderly unfolded, kissed, and replaced, for as yet no locket had been procured in which to enshrine them, and such an ornament was not likely to be procured among the reed-built wigwams of Coomassie.

Not far from him lay Jerry Wilmot, indulging in thoughts of his own—wondering on what terms were now Bella Chevenix and haughty Lady Julia Wilmot, his cold and heartless mother, who had seen him depart from his father's house to face peril, disease, toil, and, it might be, death, so callously !

Adjacent to Dalton's post was many a horrid souvenir of the hasty retreat made across the Prah by the army of King Koffee, by torchlight, on the night of the 29th of the preceding November, when three hundred men perished. On the skirts of our camp—the foreshore of the Prah—their festering corpses lay in scores, and many that were half skeletons hung curiously and terribly from the branches of trees that arched over the stream. In one place a dead Ashantee sat propped against the stem of a palm-tree, with his head between his hands, and his elbows on his knees ; around him lay a heap of bones among which the turkey buzzards waddled. All these men had perished by having failed to achieve a passage by the use of their rope bridge.

Suddenly the sound of musketry close by, ringing out sharply upon the air of the silent night, made the whole piquet start to their feet.

“Stand to !” cried Dalton, drawing his sword. “Unpile !” was the next order, and the piquet faced its line of sentries.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BATTLE OF AMOAFUL.

THE firing proved a mistake—the result of a false alarm—so the night passed without any other *alerte* or disturbance, and all remained quiet during the temporary halt at Prahsu ; but the troops heard of many strange things occurring at Coomassie, all deemed by the natives portentous of its coming fate.

In its market-place—that scene of daily blood and murder—where the predecessor of King Koffee devoted three thousand victims “to water the grave” of his mother—an ærolite fell, to the terror of the people; but there came still a greater prodigy. A child was born which instantly began to converse, and, to prevent it having intercourse with supernatural visitors, it was placed alone in a room under guards, who in the morning found that it had vanished, and that nothing lay in its place but a bundle of withered bones; and on this the fetishmen argued “that Coomassie itself would pass away, and nothing remain thereof but dead leaves;” and on the same day and hour that Lieutenant Grant of the 6th—the first white man—crossed the Prah, there sprang up a mighty tornado, that levelled the great tree under which the king used to sit, surrounded by his warriors.

This caused a profound sensation among the Ashantees, who gathered by thousands around it in the market-place, which at that time was described by one who saw it as “a den of reeking corpses, shrieking and tortured victims—men and women butchered by hundreds—where skulls and human bones lay about as oyster-shells do at home!”

By order of the king's fetishmen two prisoners had knives run through their cheeks, and were tied up in the woods to die, as a test of whether our invasion would be successful. The idea of the fetishmen was that, if the victims died soon, all would be well with Ashantee; but they lived, one for four and the other for nine days—so the nation gave itself over for lost.

On the 6th of January—the day the fetish-tree fell—we shed the first blood in that land of horrors, when Lord Gifford, at the head of fifty men, captured a village occupied by an Ashantee outpost, and killed many of its defenders.

And so, till the forward movement began, the troops were impatient during the halt at Prahsu, the soldiers making wry faces at their daily doses of quinine, and still more so at their weak ration of grog—only half a gill per man, or a gallon of rum to sixty-four men—and the officers missing sorely the pleasures of the long, glittering, flower-laden mess-table, and the charms of the girls they had left behind them, and of whom they were reminded by Du Maurier in some old stray numbers of our friend Mr. *Punch*.

After the troops advanced, the 25th of January saw our posts pushed as far forward as the Bahrien river, and a slight

brush which they had there with the Ashantees showed that they were making vigorous efforts to concentrate their forces for a fierce resistance ; and on the 31st was fought the battle of Amoaful, which took place in the morning, and by eight o'clock the white smoke of the musketry and the red flashes of the latter were spouting in every direction, amid the dark green and wondrous leafy luxuriance of the bushy jungles.

The Rifles were in the reserve, 580 strong, under Colonel Warren. Thus Dalton, Jerry, and others were for a time almost spectators while the fight went on, and the leading column—consisting of the Black Watch, 80 of the Welsh Fusiliers, and two rifled guns, led by Sir Archibald Alison (son of the historian), extending as it advanced with loud cheers at a quick run—attacked, before the rest of the troops came up, the village of Egginassie, upon the slope of the hill that rises to Amoaful.

Prominent amid the greenery could be seen the red tufts on their tropical helmets, then the representation of their famous historical scarlet plumes.

The firing here was tremendous, so much so that all sound of individual reports was lost, and the din of the conflict became one hoarse roar. The enemy used slugs, not bullets. Had it been otherwise, not a man of the Black Watch—many of whom were severely hit—would have remained to tell the tale. Major Macpherson (young Cluny) was wounded in several places, but remained under fire, propped upon a stick.

In five minutes 105 Highlanders, nine being officers, had blood pouring from their wounds ; but “Onward” was the cry, and as the Rifles came up in support, amid the ceaseless clatter of the breechloaders, “for three hours after the Scottish and Welsh infantry had carried the village,” says the *Daily Telegraph*, “the contest was obstinately maintained in the jungle, where it was difficult to see or reach the enemy, and quite as hard for him to know how the fight went upon other points. Assailed in their own wilderness, followed up foot by foot, the Ashantees fought well, but never gave a fair opportunity for the shock of a real charge.”

As the Rifles advanced through the jungle in extended order, over ground which the fire of the 42nd had strewn with killed and wounded Ashantees, one of the latter, a colossal black savage, clad only with a middle cloth and string of beads, propping himself upon his elbow, shot Jerry's

servant, O'Farrel, in the back and killed him on the spot, as the ball passed through his heart.

It was, perhaps, the last effort of expiring nature ; but Jerry responded promptly with his revolver, and sent a bullet whistling through the brain of the Ashantee, who, as he was a man of fine proportions, was soon after eaten by the Kossos or wild cannibals of Colonel Wood's regiment, who, as Jerry said, "felt peckish" after the fight.

A Highlander lost himself in the bush, and came suddenly upon a cluster of retiring Ashantees, who shot him down by a volley and instantly cut off his head, which they carried away, as no trophy is more prized by this people than human heads, which formed the chief ornaments of the king's palace, and even of his bed-chamber in Coomassie.

In the first days of February the passage of the Ordah followed, and on the night the troops bivouacked by its shore they were without tents, and the rain fell in merciless torrents, as if the windows of the sky had opened again, while thunder bellowed in the echoing woods, and green forked lightning lit up incessantly the bosom of the foaming river ; yet more than ever were our troops anxious when day broke to begin the weary march—to reach Coomassie and grapple with the dusky enemy.

The first human blood Jerry Wilmot had ever shed was when he pistoled the Ashantee who murdered—for murder it was—poor O'Farrel. He had handled his revolver then promptly, if mechanically, and thought afterwards—strange to say—with a little sense of disgust over the episode, and the aspect of the dead negro, his yellow eye-balls turned back within their sockets, his fallen jaw, and oozing brain, had actually haunted him.

But since then, in skirmishing, both in the bush and open, Jerry had, as he phrased it, "potted three or four more of the beggars," as coolly as if they had been blackcocks on a Highland moor.

While the Naval Brigade halted at Ordashu, the Black Watch, with half a battalion of the Rifles, pushed on towards Coomassie.

Soon tidings came from Sir Archibald Alison, saying briefly : "We have taken all the villages, but the last before entering Coomassie ; support me with the Rifles, and I hope to enter it to-night."

Fortunately he had been anticipated : the half battalion was close upon his own, and with it were Dalton and Wilmot.

The slugs were coming out of the bush as thick as hail, and the advance of the Highlanders and Rifles along the road that led to Coomassie was in a form never before seen in war. Colonel M'Leod led the former.

Along the well-ambushed road they proceeded quietly and steadily, as if upon parade, but by two abreast in file, so narrow was the forest path.

"Forty-Second, fire by successive companies—front rank to the right, rear rank to the left," shouted Colonel M'Leod.

"A company—front rank, present ! rear rank, present !"

"So on," says the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, "and thus vomiting bullets two score to the right and two score to the left, the companies volleyed and thundered as they marched past the ambuscades, the bagpipes playing, the cheers rising from the throats of the lusty Scots, till the forest rang again with the discordant medley of musketry, bagpipe music, and vocal sounds. Rait's artillery now and then gave tongue with an emphasis and result which must have recalled to the Ashantees memories of the bloody field of Amoaful, where Captain Rait and his subalterns, Knox and Saunders, signalised themselves so conspicuously. But it was the audacious spirit and true military bearing on the part of the Highlanders, as they moved down the road to Coomassie, which challenged admiration this day."

So great was the roar of musketry in the echoing woods that, scared by the terrible and unusual sound, the very birds of the air—and brightly plumaged birds they were—grovelled in terror, with outspread wings over the dying and the dead.

Many were borne rearward disfigured for life and frightfully wounded by the missiles of their hidden antagonists ; but the regiment never halted—the Rifles following close—nor wavered, but moved steadily on with its national music playing, until the Ashantees, conceiving it to be useless to continue against men who advanced thus heedless of all ambuscades, rose from their coverts and fled in yelling hordes towards Coomassie.

"The cool, calm commands of Colonel M'Leod," says Mr. Stanley, whom we cannot help quoting, "had a marvellous effect on the Highland battalion—so much so that the conduct of all other white regiments pales before that of the 42nd." Frequently during the hot and rapid march to Coomassie the Highlanders

saw emerging from the bushes several scores of fugitives, who found their movements accelerated by the volleys they received on such occasions. Village after village along the road heard the disastrous tidings which the fugitives conveyed, and long before the Highlanders approached the place where the king remained during the battle, he had decamped because of these reports.

King Koffee never for a moment anticipated a complete defeat, and believed that he would only fall back in good order to give us battle at the head of all his warriors in front of Coomassie itself, and thus obtain a peace which would at least spare his palace—on which he set a great store—from destruction.

When Sir Garnet Wolseley, with the main body, was drawing near that place, he received another despatch from the front. Sir Archibald Alison wrote to say that he had given some time to treat.

Thus a delay occurred in consequence, and of this delay the circumstances are not very clear to the outer world. It does not appear from some accounts to have been Sir Garnet's wish, yet it undoubtedly took place, and put the troops to some inconvenience by allowing night to fall before they entered the place.

"Coomassie at last!" exclaimed Dalton, as he threw himself, panting with heat, among the luxuriant grass that bordered the now bloody and corpse-strewn pathway. "Let us but take it, lay it in ashes, and then hey for home!" he added, hopefully. Yet he had had two narrow escapes; one ball had knocked off his helmet, and another had scarred his left cheek.

"Yes, hey for home!" said Jerry, proffering his cigar-case; but poor Dalton little knew all that had to be dared and done before he saw the last of Coomassie!

All knew that when the final attack was made there would be a fierce resistance to encounter—a great slaughter pretty certain to ensue—no quarter given or taken; and, like several others in the corps, during the unexpected halt, Dalton and Jerry were writing what might prove to each a last letter to those they loved at home; and as the former wrote there came curiously and persistently to memory the last verse of the song Laura was wont to sing to him of old:

Then think of me! for withered lies
The dearest hope I nursed;
And I have seen, with bitter sighs,
My brightest dream dispersed.

Is it strange that, after the peculiar manner of their parting Jerry's first and longest letter was not to his mother, but to Bella Chevenix?

"Poor Bella!" said he, in a broken voice, almost to himself, as he closed the epistle.

"You did not part on bad terms?" asked Dalton.

"No, thank God! What made you think so?"

"Something in your tone."

"I am writing to her, though she gave me no hope."

"No hope—*you*—why?"

"She quite misunderstands the real love I bear her, and evidently suspects that I wish to secure her hand, not because I am the squire of Wilmothurst, but because she is in reality the heiress of it."

"She—what riddle is this?" asked Dalton, taking the cigar from his lips, and eyeing his friend.

"Did I not make you understand all that before, old fellow?"

"Not quite."

"Well, old Chevenix has no end of mortgages over my inheritance—it is well-nigh all his property now; I can't even pay the interest—the mater cannot realise how heavily the old place is burdened, and what a task my father had to keep it together—so times there are when I don't care if I should be knocked on the head—bowled out here."

"Don't talk that way, Jerry," said the older man, reprehensively; "death is too close to be lightly spoken of thus."

Death was indeed closer than either perhaps thought.

"But there is your mother," urged Dalton, after a pause.

"She! It wouldn't break her 'noble' heart, even were it so with me, and I were lying stiff, as hundreds are now, in yonder bush," replied Jerry, with an irrepressible gust of bitterness, as he snipped the end off a cigar with his teeth, and, lighting it, proceeded to smoke silently and sorrowfully, while re-charging his revolver for the coming attack; "though, if we are to believe the newspapers, the grief of the 'upper ten,' like that of royalty, is something unfathomable as compared with that of any of the vulgar herd!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SCARABÆUS.

BEFORE the troops, on the side of a large, rocky hill, and in the red fiery light of the setting sun, setting in a sky where it flamed like a vast crimson globe amid an orange and amber space that blended into green and blue overhead, lay Coomassie, with all its long spacious streets of wigwam-like houses, built of wattle-work and mud, plastered and washed with white clay, ornamented with rows of beautiful banyan trees, and having before the door of each dwelling a special tree, at the foot of which were placed idols, calabashes, and human bones, as fetishes for protection against evil.

It was four miles in circumference, and its most important edifice was the palace from which King Koffee had fled—a central stone building of European architecture, in the chief thoroughfare, so spacious that it included two or three small streets, besides piazzas for the royal recreation, with arcades of bamboo, the bases of which were ornamented with elegant trellis-work of an Egyptian character. The accommodation was most ample, as befitted a monarch whom the State required to possess 3333 wives.

“There go the bugles at last, Dalton!” shouted Jerry cheerfully, as he sprang up and drew his sword, when the *advance* was sounded, just as the sun went down, and the troops began to approach this terrible place, through ground the atmosphere of which was made appalling by the awful stench from exposed corpses which lay about in every direction, and over which great vultures flapped their wings—the dead of past days of local slaughter for various royal reasons; thus it was dark when the 42nd and the Rifles reached the edge of the swamp which nearly surrounds the place—on three sides at least—that horrible and pestilential swamp, with floating bones and the rotting flesh of the victims.

The first man through it, and actually in Coomassie, was young Lord Gifford, who led the way with his scouts till he was wounded, when the enemy opened fire for a time; but as the king had fled with his warriors, the resistance was merely nominal, and tremendously hearty was the cheer of the 42nd

as they entered the place, and the pipes sent up a skirl of triumph, which announced that fact to all the troops who were coming on.

Excitement over now, Jerry Wilmot felt his soul sicken as he marched at the head of his company up one of the principal streets, with the awful odour of dead flesh everywhere around—victims never being buried, but left where they were killed, or cast into the adjacent swamp. Over all that town, as a writer has it, the odour of death hung everywhere, and came on every sickly breath of hot wind—"a town where here and there a vulture hops at one's very feet, too gorged to join the filthy flock, preening itself on the gaunt dead trunks that line the way; where blood is plastered like a pitch coating over trees, floors, and stools—blood of a thousand (fetish) victims yearly renewed; where headless bodies make common sport; where murder pure and simple—the monotonous massacre of bound men—is the one employment of the king and the one spectacle of the populace."

Amid such surroundings the troops piled arms in the market-place, guards were posted, and the rest sat down to their rations, amid the light from blazing houses, which the native levies began to loot and then set aflame; while many Ashantee warriors, who had been but recently fighting with our men, lingered near the groups quietly, with their muskets in their hands, saying ever and anon, "Tank you, tank you"—an attempt at the only English they knew.

The Fantee prisoners the troops had come so far to release were found chained to logs; and one European, an Englishman, who was found free, displayed like them the most extravagant joy on finding himself saved from death at the hands of King Koffee.

"Is there a drop in your flask, Dalton?" said an officer, propping himself on his sword. "The odour here is literally awful."

"You are welcome to what remains, but a strong cigar is best, my boy," replied Dalton, as he wrenched open a tin of preserved meat with the blade of his sword.

"Now that we are here," said Jerry, "what will the next move be?"

"Burn the whole place, no doubt, and then be off like birds," was the reply of more than one.

"And so end the most hideous and uninteresting war in which British soldiers have been engaged."

"What the devil is that? Trundle it out of sight," cried Jerry to a rifleman, who was dragging near them an object which he had found, and which proved to be one of the king's war-drums, ornamented with sixteen human skulls and thirty-two thigh bones, and in the cords of which were stuck three war-trumpets, made each to imitate a throat, with a tongue of red cloth, and jaws but too real to form the mouthpiece. "Take away the d——d thing! Who could sup with that beside them?" exclaimed Jerry, in great disgust, as the soldier laughed, saluted, and dragged away the ghastly trophy, on the resounding head of which some of his comrades were ere long beating while they sang some familiar music-hall ditty.

As it was expected that King Koffee might still come to terms, his capital was not yet given to the flames. Indeed, he had sent messengers to Sir Garnet Wolseley with missives to the effect that he would be early with him next day and arrange for peace; but the morning of the next day passed and noon without any sign of his coming, though the general and staff were in readiness to receive him, and all were restless and uneasy, as it was impossible to linger long in such a vast charnel-house as Coomassie.

A dreadful tempest of rain made the adjacent country a swamp, giving a hint that the fatal and pestilential wet season was at hand, and the words: "We must be off," were in everyone's mouth.

When five o'clock on that day came, and there were no tidings from King Koffee—now that he had betaken himself into the interior, thus proving himself unworthy of trust—it was resolved to leave marks of our power and vengeance that would never be forgotten.

The troops knew that the streams in their rear would be swollen, that the mere runnels in the ravines would soon become brawling torrents, so there was no time to be lost in getting back to the coast, where the ships awaited the army, which had only five days' provisions, so it was requisite that the campaign should end sharply, surely, and sternly.

The royal state umbrella and various gold ornaments were taken as presents for the Queen from the palace, in which the Highlanders were much exercised in their minds to find, framed upon the wall of a room, an engraving of "Burns and Highland Mary" beside a bird organ, and various old clocks, pots, and kettles; stools wet with the blood of recent human victims, the

royal couch garnished with human skulls—and skulls, indeed, adorned most of the rooms, the floors of which were full of graves. In fact, the whole palace, as Mr. Henty wrote, appeared to be little better than a cemetery, though in its cellars were found bottles of brandy, palm wine, and even champagne, which the discoverers thereof were not slow to fully appreciate, and drain off to “The girls we’ve left behind us.”

At last orders were given that the palace was to be blown up, the whole town reduced to ashes, and a start was to be made for the sea; then the five past days of continued toil and incessant fighting were forgotten, and every heart beat happily and every bronzed face grew bright.

On the day the Engineers began to mine the palace, Dalton and Jerry Wilmot paid it a visit, and the latter made very merry about the three thousand three hundred and thirty-three wives of the fugitive king.

Unluckily for them both, the former saw a gold *scarabæus*, about the size of a goose-egg, among the many strange ornaments at the head of the king’s bed, and with some force contrived to wrench it off, saying to Jerry as he did so: “An article of *bijouterie* for Laura’s boudoir—a souvenir of Coomassie!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when two tall and powerful savages, who had been quietly—if sullenly and resentfully—watching the “looting” of much royal paraphernalia and rubbish by officers and men, threw themselves upon him with yells, while brandishing long straight daggers that were minus guards or proper hilts, and who wore each at his neck a human jaw, polished clean and white, as a kind of order of valour perhaps.

Gesticulating violently, they seemed to demand the surrender of the *scarabæus*, which proved eventually to be a famous fetish—famous even as the skull of the murdered Sir Charles MacCarthy, which the king had carried off with him as the chief palladium of Ashanti.

Fortunately Dalton had his sword in his hand, and kept them at bay till they were expelled at the bayonet point by some of the Royal Engineers; but when he and Jerry came forth they were conscious that these two Ashantees with the jaw-bones were watching them and dogging their footsteps, and were menacing them; but anon they slunk away when Dalton put his hand to his revolver case.

Then they re-appeared again and again to his great annoyance and irritation.

"This looks ill," said Jerry; "it is some State fetish. Throw the confounded thing away. Chuck it at their woolly heads ere worse comes of it."

"What can come of it?" asked Dalton.

"Your assassination or mine before we reach the coast, perhaps."

"As for their menaces," said Dalton, laughing, "I value them as little as an old troop horse might a pistol-shot."

But not long after he had cause to regret not taking Jerry's advice.

In a wattle-built house, of which they had taken possession merely as a shelter from the heat of the sun by day and the baleful dew by night, the two friends were partaking of a kind of "tiffin" of tinned beef and biscuits, with a glass of grog, before the march, when, at an opening which served as a window, they became suddenly conscious of two woolly heads and two dark faces, the gleaming eyes of which were stealthily watching them, but vanished the moment Dalton started up.

"Look here, Dalton," said Jerry, "I don't like this business at all. I am not a timid fellow, nor a very thoughtful one, perhaps, but I have an unpleasant presentiment that there is more in this matter than you think."

"More in what?" asked Dalton, testily.

"This confounded gold beetle that you've bagged. Perhaps it is brass."

"Not at all. Well?"

"It is said to be some great fetish, and you may be followed, tracked to the bitter end—to Cape Coast, for all I know—till it is recaptured, or you, perhaps, made away with. You remember the story of the 'Moonstone,' published about ten years ago, and how the possessor of it was followed about till it was re-won?"

"Pshaw!—that was in a novel."

"And this is reality. Novels are supposed to represent real life."

"There go the bugles; the advance guard is falling in," said Dalton, as he put the gold *scarabæus* in his haversack, and they hurried forth.

At six o'clock in the evening the advanced guard moved off, and the main body followed in the dusk about an hour

after. The Black Watch remained as a rearguard to cover the Engineers and burning party, which consisted of about a hundred men of the latter corps.

Furnished with palm-leaf torches, they began the work of stern and deliberate destruction, and, although grave fears were expressed that the late tempests of rain would prevent the streets of thatch and wood from burning, ere long the retiring troops saw, with cheers, mighty volumes of smoke rolling from end to end of Coomassie, and there was but one regret expressed, that the flames did not consume the Bantama (or burial-place of the kings), with the temples of their hideous and atrocious paganism, made terrible by the gore of a myriad human victims.

The pipers struck up, and merrily the Highlanders began their homeward march, after the officer commanding the Engineers had reported the total destruction of the palace, which he mined at four corners, and brought down like a pack of cards.

Around it all was in flames, and, owing to the dampness of the materials of which the town was built, astounding were the columns, vast and dense, of black smoke that rolled, not only over the whole site of Coomassie, but the adjacent country, while ever and anon clear, bright pyramids of flames shot skyward as the retiring troops toiled round the margin of the corpse-strewn swamp on their homeward way, with their arms at "the slope," as all were loaded.

And so the dire portents of the fetish-men, that Coomassie—the City of the Tree—would pass away, and nothing remain of it but dead leaves, were being realised to the fullest extent.

From the nature of the narrow path, the country through which it lay, and the obscurity caused by the smoke enveloping the scenery, the march of the troops was of a somewhat straggling nature, and proved a terrible one. They had barely proceeded a hundred yards before they had every reason to rejoice that the rains so greatly dreaded had not set in three days earlier than they did.

In some parts through which the line of march lay, the district had become an entire morass, and in one place, through which—in advancing—they had passed nearly dryshod, there was a sheet of water nearly five hundred yards broad, and in another, over which a narrow wooden bridge had been thrown, there was a depth of six feet. "So King Koffee had calculated

on these spring rains, as the Emperor Nicholas did on the winter snows, to destroy our troops; but, happily, both calculated in vain."

It was during the straggling march, caused by some of these obstructions, that the catastrophe we have to narrate took place.

Again the troops were at times marching almost in file, and in rear of the last company of Rifles were the two friends, Jerry and Dalton, and, leaving their men to be led by their senior subalterns, they paced on together, laughing from time to time, and talking of home and those who awaited them there, now that the brief campaign was over, for homeward now went the thoughts of all; but these two were unaware that their steps were dogged and watched surely and stealthily.

As they made a little *détour* to avoid a more than usually deep pool surrounded by some straggling palm-trees, they found themselves face to face with at least a dozen of Ashantees—notably two of them the fellows with the jawbones. They seemed to have sprung out of the earth, so suddenly did they appear amid the eddying smoke and misty vapour; and they at once struck Dalton down before he could utter a word.

Jerry instantly shot three in quick succession with his revolver, and, knowing the report would at once summon succour, he shouted cheerily, and dragged Dalton to his feet, but at the same moment was struck down senseless by a tremendous blow on the head, and falling—falling, he knew not where—remembered no more.

In short, he had tumbled into a species of nullah or hollow, completely fringed round with enormous boughs and luxuriant greenery, where he lay hidden and undiscovered by the riflemen whom his pistol-shots summoned, and who searched the whole vicinity in vain, till they could delay no longer, as the waters were rising fast. They carried off with them Dalton, who was severely wounded by dagger-blades, and whose haversack had been cut away and taken, and with it, of course, the unlucky *scarabæus*.

And so, while poor Jerry lay where we have described, the army pushed on its homeward way, and ere long found the obstructions increase as the night advanced. Where there had been a small stream at one place the water was three hundred yards wide and five feet deep. With great toil, the Engineers bridged this by felling a huge tree, over which the white troops defiled slowly, while the carriers and others had to splash their

way through as best they could, and many of the shorter men disappeared under the surface more than once.

A worse obstruction still was encountered at Ordah, where the water had risen two feet above the bridge built by the Engineers, and was more than five feet deep in the mid-channel, and there the shorter men had all to be assisted by their comrades who could swim. Another day crept on, and by five o'clock in the afternoon the whole of the white troops had succeeded in crossing the half-hidden bridge; but darkness was coming on, the river was rising fast, and for all they knew the Ashantees, infuriated by the destruction of Coomassie, might be pouring in wild hordes upon their rear.

Dalton's wounds had been dressed, but ere that was done he had lost so much blood that his chances of recovery seemed very precarious; and, meanwhile, how fared Jerry Wilmot?

When he struggled back to consciousness, and half raised himself out of the place in which he lay by grasping the branch of a bush, he found himself alone, and surrounded by dead silence. Not a sound fell on his ear, and at a little distance he could see the red smouldering flames of Coomassie. But where were the troops?

"O God, help me!" he wailed out. "Gone—gone, and I am left alone and helpless behind them!"

There was a gleam of moonlight now, and after several futile efforts, for his senses reeled like those of one intoxicated, he made out the hour on his watch.

"Midnight—and they have been six hours on the march!"

He had been in a state of semi-unconsciousness for some two hours. The sense—the conviction that he must instantly do something—attempt to overtake them, made him struggle up desperately, feebly, and half-blinded in his own blood.

"O Lord," thought Jerry, "I shall lose the little reason I have left! Why did Dalton covet that infernal beetle?"

Alone—alone at Coomassie. Was not this some horrible nightmare, and not a reality, crushing and bewildering? for but two fates seemed to await him. If he did not die of hunger in the wilderness, he would be sure to be tracked and taken; and then, if not killed at once, he would be doomed to a lingering death by torture in Coomassie, or what remained of it—tortures such as devils alone could devise.

He made an attempt to stand, but all power of volition seemed to have left him; he fell again into the leafy hollow, and for a time remembered no more.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LOST ONE.

AND where all this time was Alison Cheyne, after whom—as the chief of our *dramatis personæ*—we must needs look now?

When consciousness returned to her, after wildly grasping the bell in the *porte-cochère* of a large house on that night of snow and terror, and when, fluttering, her white eyelids unclosed, after what seemed a long sleep, she looked round her like a little scared bird, in utter bewilderment, and, believing that she was dreaming, closed them again.

A bell ringing at a distance roused her, and she looked again, and became convinced that what she looked on was no dream, and her eyes wandered about with a dazed expression.

She was in a little room, with whitewashed walls, and a floor of plain polished wood, on which lay a tiny patch of faded carpet. The sunbeams were creeping through the closed blinds, and a fire burned cheerfully in a little black iron stove. She lay in a pretty bed, with the softest of pillows and sheets; it was of plain iron, and without curtains.

Above the mantelpiece, in a simple frame, hung an engraving from Rubens' picture of "St. Theresa Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory," the three principal souls being—in a spirit of waggery—faithful portraits of the artist's three wives. On one side of this was a little Madonna on a bracket, with a red crystal lamp hung before it; on the other a crucifix, below which was a tiny font of Antwerp china.

Other ornaments—save a few flowers in a vase—the apartment had none, and its furniture—two cane-seated chairs and a deal table—was of the simplest kind.

In one of the chairs sat a young woman dressed like a nun, with a black robe and white hood, a large bronze crucifix and wooden beads at her cord girdle; her downcast face had a sweet, placid, and even beautiful expression, and she was sedulously working, with the whitest of hands, at a large piece of gold embroidery on cloth of silver—a portion of a priest's vestments apparently, while glancing attentively from time to time down on her patient or up at two pretty little love-birds in a brass cage.

Alison took in all these details at one rapid glance, and great terror seized her that something strange had befallen her, that she was in the care of a nursing sister.

"Where am I?" she said, faintly.

"Thank heaven, you speak, and rationally at last," said her attendant, casting aside her embroidery, and coming softly to her side, laid her cool hand gently on Alison's forehead. "*Pauvre enfant ! pauvre enfant !*" she repeated, caressingly.

"But *where* am I, and *who* are you?" asked Alison, in a weak but impatient manner.

"I am Sister Lisette, and you are safe, safe with friends, and ere long your own people will soon be here to inquire for you."

"My friends," she murmured with a puzzled expression, as her thoughts now went back to her father's sick-room in the Hôtel St. Antoine; to Cadbury, at the thought of which she shivered; to the Bal Masqué at the theatre; the Café au Progrès, and the insolence of "Captain Smith;" her flight through the snowy streets; her fall at the door of a house, the nature of which she knew not; all these things floated dreamily before her now, though they seemed to have happened but a few hours ago.

"How fortunate that you had the power to ring our bell before you fainted, child!" said the nun, caressing her and kissing her cheek. "You might have died in the snow otherwise."

"Last night?"

"No—child—it was several nights ago."

"Several?"

"Yes."

"Oh, papa, papa! has he been here?" cried Alison, feebly, in great anguish of mind, yet unable from weakness to raise her head from the pillow.

"No; for doubtless he knew not where you were."

"Oh, he will be dead—dead with terror!" wailed Alison. "Am I in a hospital?"

"No, child, in my house," said the nun, sweetly.

"Your house?" queried Alison, with very open eyes.

"In the Béguinage, in the Rue Rouge."

Thus it was that both Sir Ranald and Lord Cadbury had utterly failed to trace her, and fortunate it was indeed for Alison that she had fallen into such good hands as those of the Béguines, who are a religious Order, altogether peculiar to

Belgium, each nun having a private residence of her own within the general enclosure.

The clatter of the ponderous bell, as the pull left her hand, had soon brought aid to her. She was denuded of her wet and sodden attire, put to bed in the little mansion occupied by Sister Lisette, and, before the angelus bell rang in the chapel next forenoon, she was in a highly feverish state, and in a delirium which lasted several nights and days, with intermissions of fretful sleep, during all of which time nothing coherent could be gleaned from her as to her name, or where she resided, whence she came, and how it was that she was abroad in the streets alone and in such a night.

Her little ravings led them to know that she was English; her costume, and the delicacy and beauty of her person, that she was undoubtedly a lady; but, save a ring or two, she had no purse, card-case, or aught to indicate who she was; but the name of "Alison" worked upon some of her clothing at once interested deeply Sister Lisette, who was also an Alison, but adopted the French diminutive of it.

The poor Béguines were quite uncertain what else they could do with her, but keep her till she grew well enough to be questioned; so she remained there in her little iron bed, tended by Lisette, unconscious and fever-stricken, while the lengthening days passed slowly over her aching head.

Nearly a fortnight passed before she began mentally to drift back to consciousness, so terribly had all she had undergone of late—the collision at sea with the *Black Hound* of Ostend, the nursing of her querulous father, her separation from Bevil Goring, and the worry incident to Cadbury's wooing, culminating in that night of terror in the streets—told upon her sensitive nature and delicate frame.

A sweet picture she made, in her little white bed in the plain bare room of the kind Béguine, who never left her even for prayers, but said them by her side on her knees when the angelus or elevation bells rang. Among the huge, soft pillows the slight figure of Alison was half buried, yet the soft tints of her face and hair came out in a species of relief from them; the former was pale—very pale—and there were dark circles under the eyes; and the gentle young Béguine who watched her thought she had never looked on anyone so lovely, and often sat on a tabourette at the side of the couch, keeping her hand

caressingly within her own, and counting the jewels in her rings one by one as a child might have done.

"She has a gentle expression in her eyes, such as I have often seen in those of a *Sœur de Charité*, and other nursing sisters," was the dictum of the reverend mother of the establishment, who came from time to time to visit the fair waif who had been so suddenly cast upon their tenderness ; and, truth to tell, there was a great touch of melancholy about the eyes and features of Alison Cheyne now, though certainly melancholy was by no means one of her characteristics naturally.

The Béguines, we have said, are a religious Order peculiar to Belgium, and totally unlike any other in so far that they are bound by no vows ; they may return to the world whenever they please ; but it is their boast that no sister has ever been known to quit the Order after having once entered it. They attend to the sick in the Béguinage, and frequently go out as nurses in the hospitals.

They were among the few religious communities not suppressed by Joseph II., or swept away by the furious torrent of the French Revolution. Each Béguinage—more especially in Ghent, where the sisterhood averages six hundred in number—is a species of little town by itself, with streets and squares, having gates, and sometimes surrounded by a moat as well as a wall, especially at Bruges.

The sisters live generally in separate houses, on the doors of which are inscribed, not the name of the occupant, but of some saint adopted as her patron or protectress ; and many of them are persons of rank and wealth ; hence it was in the private house of Sister Lisette that Alison found herself now.

Many writers ascribe the institution of the Béguines to St. Begga, widow and abbess, daughter of Pepin of Landen, whose husband, mayor of the place, was killed while hunting, after which she dedicated herself to a penitential state of retirement, and built seven chapels on the Meuse, in imitation of the seven great churches of Rome ; and, according to the martyrology, she died so long ago as 698. Others assert that the Béguines were founded by Lambert de Begue or Balbus, a pious priest, of Liege, in 1170, and derive their name from him ; but all this lies apart from our story. Suffice it that, fortunately for herself, it was in the spacious Béguinage of Antwerp that Alison found succour, shelter, and protection.

Alison had often seen nuns, but never spoken to or been

intimate with one before, and, as all she knew of such recluses was derived through the medium of novels and romances, when strength returned to her she began to invest Sister Lisette with the halo of fiction, and to suppose that she must have some story—that a lost lover or a broken heart accounted for her sweet sadness of face and her present vocation ; and she was nearer the truth in her guess than she imagined, for Sister Lisette had once been—for a brief time—a happy wife, of which more anon ; and when Alison grew stronger, and was taken as far as the chapel, she was greatly impressed by all she saw and heard there at vesper time, though the chanting of female voices only—some of them from age far from melodious—was pleasing, and the sight of such a large assemblage of recluses in black robes with white veils—the ancient Flemish *faillie*, which they yet retain—dimly illuminated by a few votive lamps, had a strange, weird, and, to her eyes, mysterious effect.

The novices are distinguished by a different costume, and those who have just taken the veil wear a chaplet round their heads.

But in all this we are anticipating, for at present Alison was weak as a child, and prostrate with the effect of the short, sharp fever that had left her, though it was apparent to those who watched her that the lines of her face were fine, and they could see that, when well and happy, she must look very beautiful.

In Sister Lisette, Alison found an able nurse, for she had served as one in the German war under the Red Cross ; her soft white hand had dressed many a ghastly wound and closed many a glazing eye, and often amid the horrors of Sedan and elsewhere the heads of the dying had rested on her bosom, and with low, loving words, she had soothed their moments of death and agony—words that were sometimes taken for those of mother, or wife, or some young love that was far, far away.

Sister Lisette seemed about five-and-twenty years of age ; her face was delicately fair, but the rich tint of her lips and the peach-like bloom of her cheeks relieved it of all paleness. Her features were small and regular, but very soft in their lines, and, at times, a singular sadness stole over them.

Her eyes were of the clearest and darkest hazel, and full of "soul's light," imparted to her face a world of expression ; but what the colour of her hair (or what remained of it) was, it

would be impossible to say, as every vestige of it was closely hidden by her tightly-fitting white wimple.

"And I have been here for days and nights ill," said Alison faintly, as consciousness came fully back to her, and Lisette, while propping her pretty head upon her own breast, gave her soothing drink. "Oh, what a trouble I must have been to you!"

"No trouble at all, *ma sœur*," replied the other, letting her head tenderly down on the pillow, and smoothing out the latter.

"So long, so long, and without papa being informed," exclaimed Alison, as tears of dismay started to her eyes.

"Child, we know not his name—his address—even of his existence."

Alison sighed deeply. She was too prostrate in body and even mind to regard anything as very extraordinary, even her unusual surroundings in the convent; yet she longed for her father to come to her, or to have tidings of him; of aught else she said nothing.

"Oh, if I should die without seeing papa again!" said she, wringing her hands.

"One can die but once," said Sister Lisette, placidly. "You are too strong and too young to die, those who die are sometimes better off than those who are left in the world. You, at least, have all your life to look forward to."

"And you?"

"Mine is ended."

"Ended!"

"In the world at least, as I shall go back to it no more."

Seeing that Alison was in a fever of impatience to hear tidings of her father, Sister Lisette, on obtaining his name and address at the Hôtel St. Antoine, at once sent a messenger with that letter which, as we have described, so greatly startled and agitated the old man; and Alison remained in a fever of impatience, awaiting the return of that messenger who might perhaps bring her very crushing tidings.

"Dearest papa will not lose a moment in coming to me," she murmured, partly to her nurse and partly to herself; but how, if he were too weak to come or in despair at her loss had left Antwerp, or perhaps—oh Heavens!—have sunk under it, and—died! And to see him again would be, of course, to see that odious Lord Cadbury; and so she tormented herself till the messenger returned with tidings that her father was well

and had been out and about for days, despairingly searching for her, and would be with her very soon.

"Oh, thank God for that!" said Alison, and a hot shower of joyful tears relieved her; and now she started up at every sound, and inquired again and again the exact distance between the Béguinage and the Marché aux Souliers.

"*Ma sœur* Alison, you must not speak so much and be so impatient," said the Béguine, holding up a finger.

"What—you know my name?"

"Yes, it is mine also."

"But how?"

Then the Béguine told her how she had become aware of it; and that she too was an Alison, Lison, or Lisette—it was all one—and as she spoke her hearer's memory went back to that day with the Buckhounds on which our story opens, when Bevil Goring expressed some surprise at her name, and she had explained that it was an old Scoto-French one, and common to the Cheynes of Essilmont; and as she thought of him she pressed his ring to her lips, as if it had been some sacred relique.

"How well you speak English!" said Alison.

"Because I was educated in the English convent at Bruges," replied the sister; "but hark, there is the voiture at the gate—monsieur has come!"

"Papa," murmured Alison, in a choking voice, as she felt herself become a very child again; and another minute saw his arms around her, and her face upon his breast, while she indulged in a passionate fit of weeping, and he with difficulty restrained his tears.

Alison then, after a little time, looked earnestly in his face, and was shocked to see how wan, and thin, and pinched it had become; for indeed, during the mystery that developed her disappearance, he had undergone terrible mental agony and much bodily fatigue, for with all his selfishness he loved Alison as the only link that bound him to earth.

Her narrative of how she missed Lord Cadbury in that crowded place, the Théâtre des Variétés, to which she should never have gone, tallied completely with that of the former; but it was not until next day that she detailed fully the manner in which she had been lured by "Captain Smith" to the Café au Progrès, and the terror with which she had fled from that place into the snowy street.

"Captain Smith!" exclaimed Sir Ranald through his set teeth, while his eyes sparkled with rage. "Could I but meet that person, old as I am, I would give him cause long to remember the weight of my cane, the scoundrel. I must write to Cadbury on the subject and inquire."

"Write!—is Lord Cadbury gone?" asked Alison, timidly and hopefully.

"Yes, back to London; he was telegraphed for."

Alison gave a sigh of relief.

"Shall we go home now, papa—I mean when I am well enough to be about?"

Sir Ranald paused before replying. Had she relented towards Cadbury with a desire to see him, or was it a longing to be near "that fellow Goring" which prompted the question? One fact seemed pretty evident, that she and the latter knew nothing of each other's movements, and that she was utterly oblivious of his being or having been in Antwerp.

"Home to where?" he asked.

"Chilcote, papa."

Her reply was perfectly straightforward, though it again suggested ideas of Bevil Goring, but Sir Ranald deemed that he must have "effectually crushed that fellow's presumption by the rough tenor of their last meeting."

"Chilcote it shall be then, perhaps," said he.

"Oh yes, papa; it is so quiet there, even amid our little troubles," said she, as he left her, when the Béguinage gates were closed for the evening; "and all I want is peace and rest—peace and rest."

"Shall you ever get them in this world?" asked Sister Lisette.

Alison regarded her wistfully, and said: "Why not? Can you have led a stormy life?"

"Far from it. My life in the world was a happy one till one dire calamity fell upon me, and drove me to find peace for ever here; but how true it is 'that it is vain to try to knit up the present with the past; each part of our lives has its own pleasures and hopes.' But now my pleasure is to do good—my only hope to die soon and well."

"And the calamity to which you refer?" asked Alison softly, while greatly interested by the singularly sweet and subdued manner of the young Béguine.

"Was the death of my dear, dear husband," replied the

Sister ; and so, while she sat stitching away at the shining garment, resplendent with gold—a priest's vestment—for old Père Leopold of the Church of St André, she told Alison some of her experiences in life, and amid them, curious to relate, there occurred repeatedly a name with which the reader is already familiar.

Alison had a sweetly sympathetic way with her, and her namesake was seized by one of the unaccountable fits of confidence that come to most of us at times to speak about herself, and tell the story of her own sorrows.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A YEAR OF JOY.

A VERY simple circumstance—an occasion of everyday life—a railway journey, brought about the awful tragedy in her life, by which she was left a widow at twenty, after being wedded a year—which she called a year of joy, left without a near relation in the world but her brother, Victor Gabion, a captain of artillery, who, strange to say, was the source of all her sorrow.

“After leaving the English convent at Bruges, I returned to the house of my guardian, M. Hoboken, a merchant in the Avenue du Commerce here. My parents were dead ; I had but one brother, Victor Gabion, to whose brother officer Lucien I had been betrothed by them, and whom I had known from his early boyhood, when we had been playmates together, and before we came to those restrictions in intercourse peculiar to French and Belgian society in later years.

“We had learned to love each other very much, Lucien and I, though now we could only see each other at given times, and always in the presence of a third party ; and each time I seemed to discover some fresh trait in his disposition which rendered him more worthy of love and more worthy of the tenderest affection.

“He was so handsome, my Lucien, so kind, so tender ; and so good, so religious and true ! He had that dark southern beauty which makes a man so attractive to a fair woman, and, moreover, he possessed that charm which is more attractive and dangerous still—he was interesting.”

Alison thought of her own *fiancé*, Bevil Goring, and believed she could understand all this to the fullest extent.

His means were ample and his position good, for, apart from his rank in the artillery, he was the representative of the Volcarts, one of the seven *Familles Patriciennes d'Anvers*; whose seven coats-of-arms, all bearing a *fesse chequy* you may see at this hour carved in the ancient Steyne of Antwerp. But why think of or boast of such things, when life, we are told, is but a dream, and often a very painful and feverish one?

"I have told you that I was educated in the convent at Bruges with English girls and English ladies. Hence I picked up among them some of that genuine and honest freedom of action which they understood and enjoyed; so when my betrothal to Lucien was fully known, and even the time of our marriage stated, we contrived to have more than one pleasant meeting unknown to my grim guardian, M. Hoboken, whose absorption in business, and often long absence at the Bassin du Kattendyk, and even at Flushing, afforded us facilities we could not otherwise have had.

"But in all this there was a dire fatality, and I shall never forget the day that brought it about.

"M. Hoboken was to be absent at Flushing for two days, and madame was an invalid—unable to go abroad. I met Lucien by appointment in one of the solitary walks, in the quiet park near the Avenue du Commerce, with a gift I had procured for him, when within a week of our marriage.

"‘Look what I have brought for you!’ said I, as I opened a morocco case containing an armlet of silver, like an Indian bangle—you know what I mean—flat and broad, and closed by a spring lock. In raised letters on the outside was my name, Alison, with the date of our coming marriage.

"‘You are my prisoner already,’ said I, laughingly, as I fitted the band round his wrist, and the spring closed with a snap—thus it could neither fall off nor pass over his hand.

"‘My dear love!’ he exclaimed, and pressed me passionately to his breast.

"‘Now, you are most completely mine,’ I whispered; ‘fettered for life—as without my aid you can never get it off.’

"‘Why?’

"‘Because I shall keep the key,’ said I, and coquettishly dropped it into my bosom.

“‘Even as you have the key to my heart,’ he added.

“After a pause he said: ‘M. Hoboken is still at Flushing?’

“‘Yes—and does not return till to-morrow.’

“‘*Très bien!*’ said Lucien, ‘by what hour, at the utmost, may Madame Hoboken miss you—or require you?’

“‘By seven certainly, and she supposes me to be at the Béguinage—and so will ask no questions, to put me in a false position.’

“‘Seven—it wants eight hours of that time. See, Lisette, how lovely the day is—how bright the sun, and how beautiful the white and pink hawthorn that load the air with fragrance!’

“‘Well, what of that?’

“‘Does not such a day make you long to leave dusty Antwerp behind you, and to roam in the country?’

“‘It does indeed; but I dare not think of such a thing—till—till next week,’ I replied, coyly.

“‘Lisette,’ said he, ‘were you ever at the village of Elewytt, where the old château of Rubens stands, between Malines and Vilvorde? It is a lovely place, and wild as lovely; not a soul would see us there. Come with me, darling, and let us spend one happy day together.’

“‘I dare not—I dare not,—as a vision of Madame Hoboken, prim, and full of proprieties, oppressed me, though I was secretly overwhelmed with delight at the suggestion of this stolen, and, to me, new kind of pleasure—a whole beautiful summer afternoon to be spent hand in hand with Lucien—hand in hand, as we were wont to be when children in the Place Verte or the Boulevards.

“‘Come with me, sweet one,’ he whispered, ‘it will never—can never be known. It is less than an hour by railway, and amid the bosky thickets and gardens of the old château we shall seem to leave the world behind us.’

“So strong was the temptation to spend an untrammelled afternoon with my betrothed—he who within a week was to be my husband—that I yielded. I knew that I ran a dreadful risk in being seen alone with him, for Antwerp is one of the most scandalous and gossipy towns in Belgium. In this country the rules are very strict as regards the daily intercourse of ladies and gentlemen, in the mere matters of meeting or conversing, as compared with you in England, where the perfect freedom of the innocent is so great; and hence, I doubt not, your happier marriages; for in Belgium, as in

France, we are forced to espouse those to whose inner lives we are strangers, and to whose hearts, before marriage, we can have no key, if it is ever found at all.

"A voiture took us to the train, and we took seats in separate carriages. Already the simple, child-like expedition had an air of guilt, and a tremulous fear possessed me as the train glided out of the station, through a cutting in the fortifications at the Rue du Rempart—the wet fosse was left behind, and we sped through the open country.

"Glorious was the summer day; exhaled by heat, the silvery mist was curling up from the rich pastures, amid which the drowsy cattle stood knee-deep, and from the fertile arable lands, over which the giant sails of the windmill cast their shadows; but my heart—now that I was alone though separated from Lucien by only a carriage or two—sank lower and lower with vague apprehension, and I restrained my tears with difficulty. I was full of terrors, scruples, and fears an English girl, circumstanced as I was, would fail to comprehend, and after traversing miles of dairy farms, where the summer breeze played so sweetly on the long ripples of verdant grass, we reached the little roadside station, where a path diverged to Elewytt. I gathered courage when Lucien Volcarts joined me, and we found ourselves indeed alone, for we were the only persons who quitted the train, which steamed slowly—as all Belgian trains do—on its way to Vilvorde, and our short but delicious day of rambling and planning, scheming and dreaming out our future, hand clasped in hand, began.

"We saw the old château of Rubens, now falling fast to decay, amid its trees, on the land of which he was seigneur, but we did not go near it, and contented ourselves with wandering amid the sylvan scenery, all of which had the charm of extreme novelty to me. The birds that flew overhead or sang in the hedgerows; the thickets of beech and oak, casting shadows over pools where the trout rose to catch the floating fly; the white, waxen-like lilies floating on their surface; a little stream pouring slowly between gravel banks and sandstone rocks; deep water-cuts in which the Cuyplike cattle stood midleg for coolness; the quaint cottages, few and far apart; the carillons playing in a distant spire, were all sources of delight to me—delight all the more that I could turn from them ever and anon to look into the tender and loving eyes of Lucien.

"At one of the cottages, which quite approached the dignity of a small farm, we got some refreshment—bread, milk, and cheese—just as we had been wont to do when children in charge of the same *bonne*, and the recollection of that made us laugh and all the more enjoy such simple fare; and truth to tell, though so near our marriage day, in the freedom of the hour we felt very much as if we were happy children again; and long we lingered in one spot, I remember, on a grassy bank under a bower of hawthorn, where the flies buzzed and the bees hummed, and the village bells rang softly out, but now it was their evening chime.

"Evening—that suggested thoughts of home and the necessity for returning, and we had some miles to walk to the railway station at Elewyt.

"'It is only five, dearest Lisette,' urged Lucien, looking at his watch; 'and the train, which deposits us at Antwerp, is not due for an hour yet. In a little time we shall go, *petite*.'

"The die was cast for a day of pleasure, but marred by secret fears. I was content to remain a little longer, and then we set out for the station. More than once did my apprehensive heart, full of undefined forebodings, suggest the sound of a coming train upon the air, and once, perhaps, it was real, for, on reaching the hamlet of Elewyt, we found the station gate shut and the platform untenanted.

"Lucien looked at his watch and grew pale. The hands still stood at five o'clock—it was now past seven, the hour at which I should have been at Madame Hoboken's, and the *last* train had gone some minutes before.

"'Gone!' replied Lucien, in a bewildered tone, to his informant; 'and the next?'

"'Not till seven to-morrow morning—from Brussels *via* Vilvorde.'

"Both of us were filled with dire dismay as we heard this. Could a voiture, a vehicle of any kind, be procured? Alas! there was not such a thing at Elewyt.

"We turned away with sickening hearts, and I must own that mine died within me. How was I ever to face grim and grave Madame Hoboken? I felt as if I had committed a terrible crime; I shed the bitterest tears, and I cannot tell you, here at least, how sweetly Lucien strove to console and soothe me.

"I must find you shelter for the night at yonder cottage,

where we got the milk, till train time to-morrow,' said Lucien ; 'for myself, I must find it where I may. Come, *petite*, take courage ; a little time, and we shall be blessedly independent of everyone.'

"On seeing Lucien's well-filled purse, the woman at the cottage was willing enough to accommodate us, especially on learning that we had lost the train ; but she filled me with fresh dismay on informing me, with a cunning and penetrating glance there was no mistaking, that she had 'but one *chambre à coucher*, which she sometimes let to passing English people and others who wished to avoid strangers ; and you, monsieur——'

"'Oh ! I will sleep in the stable, or anywhere, madame, provided you can accommodate *mademoiselle ma sœur*,' interrupted Lucien, colouring at the necessary falsehood which he told for the first time in all his blameless life, but it was one to protect me.

"Whether the landlady believed him or not I cannot say ; but there was a strange and saucy twinkle in her eyes, and while in attendance upon us she provoked me by an air of discretion she adopted ; from past experience apparently she was far too discreet to make sudden irruptions on our *tête-à-tête* evening, however innocent it was, in outward seeming as she no doubt thought, and Lucien twisted his dark moustache angrily, as he muttered : "'*Sapristi !* this hag does not live midway between Brussels and Antwerp for nothing.'

"'Darkness must be closing over Antwerp now, and all the lamps in the Avenue du Commerce would be lighted throughout its spacious length and breadth,' was then my thought ; 'what would Madame Hoboken be thinking and saying of my non-appearance ? Had Monsieur Hoboken returned by train from Flushing ? Doubtless he had. Where would they be anxiously and angrily suspecting I was ?' If they supposed me to be remaining—as I had more than once done if a night proved wet—when visiting here at the Béguinage all would be well ; but the morning might ere long produce untoward revelations, and I wept as if my heart would break when once again I was left alone, as my poor Lucien betook him to sleep in a loft above the stables, deploring the *malheur* in which he had involved us both ; but he had no one to scold him save his colonel if he missed a parade, while my life and whole future might be made a burden to me.

"Anyway, I was, from a Belgian point of view especially, in a dreadfully false position.

"There could have been no mistake as to the hour of the fatal train, though all public clocks in Belgium strike the hour half an hour beforehand, thus at half-past eleven the clock announced twelve; and luckily for me Lucien was in plain clothes, not *en grande tenue* as he usually was, with sword and epaulets on; consequently he would be less remarked, and fortunately the rain fell heavily that night, which might account for my remaining for shelter at the Béguinage.

"When morning came my spirits rose a little, and I was up betimes to meet the early train. How lovely looked the opening summer day! The grass in the fields, the herbs and flowers in the gardens all glittered in the rays of the sun, as if the dew that moistened them had been diamonds, and the tops of the firs seemed edged with silver. A golden and purple glow filled all the eastern sky, and between it and earth the vapours of night were floating. The birds were awake, and the bees hummed and the butterflies flitted about.

"To me the country seemed new and charming, and its continuity of horizontal lines, each rising beyond the other to the level horizon, where in the distance rose the spires of Antwerp, gave a sense of vastness and novelty.

"In different carriages Lucien and I returned to the city. We parted with but a glance at the station, and with a palpitating heart I sought my temporary home in the Avenue du Commerce—my mind a prey to dire misgivings, full of the stolen summer day at Elewytt, the lost train, the cottage amid the pastures, and Madame Hoboken to be confronted!

"My innocent secret made a very coward of me. Never had I told a falsehood, and I felt as if I would rather die than tell one now. I had done nothing to be ashamed of, and yet the inferences were terrible, especially in society constituted as it is in Belgium.

"‘You were, of course, at the Béguinage?’ said madame, interrogatively, as she came in from early mass.

"‘Yes; I went there in the forenoon,’ I replied, with a sinking heart, though such was precisely the case.

"‘And doubtless the rain detained you all night?’

"‘The rain,’ said I assentingly.

"‘Yet it did not begin to fall till after you should have been at home.’

"I hurried to my own room to avoid further questioning, happy in the conviction that in six days now I should be the wife of Lucien, and a free woman.

"Let me hasten over all that followed.

"How my brother Victor—cold, proud, and stern—discovered our escapade I never exactly knew, nor ever shall know probably till that day when all things shall be revealed, but he became, fatally for us, aware of it all.

"‘You were *not* at the Béguinage on the night you said you were?’ said he, in a low concentrated voice, two days after, while grasping my wrist like a vice, and eyeing me with eyes that sparkled with fury.

"‘How do you dare to say so?’ I exclaimed, but in a low and agitated voice.

"‘*Sapristi!*’ said he. ‘You shall learn in time.’

"My heart died within me, for there was the blackness of a thundercloud in Victor’s face as he flung me from him, and matters progressed quickly after that. I was confined to my own room, but Madame Hoboken informed me that several officers came to and fro after Lucien—that there were long and grave conferences—that Lucien seemed terribly disturbed, and she feared there was to be a duel on the subject, and a duel there was, but not with swords or pistols. Oh, *mon Dieu!* In the agony of my heart I am anticipating.

"I grew nearly mad with terror till my marriage morning came, and I found that no catastrophe had taken place, for Victor came to conduct me to church, and I wept tears of thankfulness, joy, and gratitude, as one who had escaped the shipwreck of a whole life (through no fault of my own), when I was united by Père Leopold to Lucien, in the Church of St. André—the church in which we had both been baptized, where we had made our first communion together—that church with its wonderfully carved pulpit, representing Andrew and Peter called from their nets and boats by the Saviour, all as large as life; and the altar of St. Anthony, with his little pig; and the black devil, with a long, red tongue, that used to frighten me in childhood.

"The moment the ceremony was over, Victor quitted the church without a word, and I never saw him again. He never visited or came near us, but remained sullenly aloof, as the months of the first, and, alas! last, year of our married life—my year of joy—rolled swiftly on. His mood would change, I

hoped, in time. Meanwhile, Lucien, my husband, was all the world to me; and how proud and pleased I used to be to see our names united, Volcarts-Gabion, as is the custom in Antwerp!

"Looking back to that time I fear that, in our excessive love for each other, Lucien and I were a little selfish. We seemed to have so much to do in our new home—a pleasant house in the Avenue Van Dyck, overlooking the wooded mounds and beautiful lakes of the park—we had ever so much to say to each other, that we seemed to have no leisure for making friends, or even acquaintances, and we forgot to return, or did so grudgingly, the visits of our hospitable neighbours.

"If I am to speak from personal experience no woman was ever more superlatively happy than I, or more blessed in her husband, and every hour that Lucien could spare from his military duties at the Caserne des Prédicateurs was devoted to me; and so my year of joy stole swiftly away, and the first anniversary of our marriage drew near.

"At last I became painfully conscious of a new and unusual gloom, restlessness, and depression of manner in Lucien, even when he was caressing me, which he began to do more tenderly and frequently than ever. There was something unfathomable in the expression of his eyes, and unaccountable in the sadness of his voice, and in vain I pressed him to tell me what grieved him.

"'Every human heart has some secret which it longs to keep hidden from all,' said he one day at last.

"'But you, dearest Lucien, should have none from me,' I urged, with my face on his breast, which was heaving painfully under my cheek.

"'That to which I refer you will learn in time—most terribly—my darling Lisette,' said he.

"'Oh, why not now?' I urged; 'how cruel this is of you, Lucien!'

"'In old tales,' said he, kissing away my tears, 'you have read of persons who sold themselves to the devil?'

"'Yes,' said I, breathless with wonder and apprehension at his manner.

"'And whose time on earth was hence allotted?'

"'Yes.'

"'Do you think that after such a bond was signed—perhaps in blood—life would be pleasant?'

“‘No, Lucien ; but what *do* you mean ?’

“‘That I seem to have so sold myself,’ he replied wildly, with his eyes closed.

“‘Oh, explain—what do you—what *can* you mean?’ I asked him imploringly, as a dreadful fear came over me that his brain was affected.

“‘I have sold myself to an evil spirit, and now come remorse and misery—remorse for what you will suffer, misery for my own future.’

“‘Oh, Lucien—my husband !’ I exclaimed, folding him in my arms, ‘what do these dreadful words mean ?’

“‘I have so sold myself in a manner, Lisette,’ said he, passionately, ‘and I shall have to pay the bitter, bitter penalty in losing you and life, and even more, perhaps, and all for what is called honour.’

“‘What awful riddle is this ?’ I moaned.

“His words seemed to me like some dead language, the import of which I failed to understand.

“‘Do not, oh, Lisette, when the fatal time comes, deem me a madman,’ said he, covering my face with kisses—yea, and tears too.

“‘What end—oh, what can all this mean?’ I cried, repressing with difficulty a desire to shriek aloud while holding him in my embrace, for he seemed almost to faint ; his lips were a violet tint, and his face was deathly pale.

“‘I cannot tell you all that is before me, or what I have to do and to suffer, beyond even what I suffer now, lest you should loathe me, scorn me ; but oh, pity me, Lisette, pity me when all is over !’

“‘O God, he is mad !’ I whispered in my heart.

“‘I dare not tell you,’ he resumed ; ‘I have an enemy who is merciless, and I have blighted your life and my own by an act of folly, almost baseness, over which I had no control.’

“Unutterable, indescribable was my longing, my anxious and affectionate curiosity to know what this secret was, but next day—on the anniversary of our marriage—I knew all.

“By an arrangement of which all the officers of their corps were cognizant, Lucien and my brother, Victor Gabion, who had challenged him, fought what was called an American duel two days before our marriage. Two little balls, a black and a white one, had been placed in a hat, and each of the two principals drew out one, with the understanding ‘that he who

drew the black one must be numbered with the dead within twelve months.'

"The year—my year of joy—had expired, and in the evening Lucien shot himself! Two days before he had written a touching letter to Victor, praying him for my sake to release him from the penalty he had incurred, but the letter miscarried, it was never delivered, and no answer came.

"Lucien had died on the instant, and he was found with my bracelet clasped upon his arm. It is buried with him, and my heart is buried too," added the Béguine, sweetly and simply.

Hence it was, doubtless, that Captain Victor Gabion had such a horror of duels, as he told Bevil Goring, and that the memory of one haunted him; and hence it was also that Sister Lisette, after being a Red Cross nurse in the war, finally entered the Béguinage, that she might the better dedicate herself to the service of God and to prayer for the dead.

Alison Cheyne had endured many bitternesses, humiliations, and mortifications during her short experience of life; but, save the loss of her mother and brothers, no such keen and unmerited misery as her poor Belgian namesake, whose strange story gave her some food for reflection, when the world of waters rolled between them.

The sojourn of Alison in the Béguinage of the Rue Rouge was an epoch in the history of that ancient institution, an era in the peacefully monotonous and uneventful lives of the Sisterhood.

Before this sudden illness fell upon her, Alison's health had been at a very low ebb, "down many pegs too low," as her father had said. She had lived in a series of excitements, joys, and sorrows of a feverish nature, the joy of meetings with Bevil, the sorrows of their separation; fears for her father's health, his debts and duns; she had to exert herself all day, yet lay all night awake; then came the rough voyage and the catastrophe which formed a part of it. Her delicate frame was being worn out, without the necessary supports of proper rest or proper food, and yet latterly she had been an inmate of one of the largest and most magnificent hotels in Antwerp.

But she had great vitality about her, and now recovered fast.

"We must meet again—we shall meet again!" exclaimed Alison, as she kissed her namesake many times while bidding her adieu.

"How are we ever to meet," said the Sister, smiling, "unless you come to the Béguinage, as I never leave it?"

"Time will show," said Alison.

"Yes," replied the other, "time and God will show."

Alison remembered these apparently prophetic words after she was at home, and Antwerp was far away, and her visit there seemed but a dream; for three days after saw her and Sir Ranald in England. "Ours is a nation of travellers," says a writer, "and no wonder, when the elements, air, water, fire, attend our bidding to transport us from shore to shore; when the ship rushes into the deep, her track the foam as of some mighty torrent, and in three hours or less we stand gazing or gazed at among a foreign people. None want an excuse. If rich they go to enjoy; if poor to retrench; if sick to recover; if studious to learn: if learned to relax from their studies."

None of these objects had brought Alison—the creature of circumstances, and of the plans formed by others—to Antwerp, and now that she was home again—or once again on British soil—the reader may imagine how anxiously she longed for some tidings of Bevil Goring (all unwitting that he had been so long near her, in the land of the stranger), whether he had gone to face the perils of war on the Gold Coast, or had been detached at home; and the only one who could have speedily enlightened her thereon was the person to whom she dared not utter his name—Sir Ranald.

So poor Alison could but sigh and think with L. E. L. that

Earth were too like Heaven
If length of life to love were given.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN HAMPSHIRE AGAIN.

"I wish Jerry were here to help me!" sighed Lady Julia, as she lounged in a luxurious fauteuil in the beautiful drawing-room of Wilmothurst, with "Cousin" Emily, on a dull afternoon in February, when the trees in the stately Chase were dripping with moisture, and the reedy fens and lonesome marshes, where the bittern boomed and the heron waded,

looked dreary, and the edges of the water-flags were stiff and white with frost. "I would Jerry were here to help me with his advice! Not that his advice would help us much, perhaps, Emily," she added querulously.

"Advice, Aunt Julia? When poor dear Jerry was here, he did nothing," replied that young lady.

"And that was all he ever cared to do, Emily; but I have seen so little of Jerry since he joined the Rifles that I seem to be quite alone in the world."

And she sighed a little conventional sigh, while spreading her feather fan, though a large crystal screen was placed between her and the brilliant fire that burned in a grate of steel polished like silver.

"But matters have come to a crisis with us; through me, I fear," she added.

"Through you, aunt?"

"Yes, unfortunately."

"How—in what way?"

"Did you not see how I turned my back upon that minx, Miss Chevenix, at the Charity Bazaar last week; cut her dead indeed, and this is the result!" exclaimed Lady Julia, tossing from her contemptuously a letter she had recently received.

"What result?" asked Emily Wilmot, too languid to open the missive in question.

"Her father will wait for the interest on the mortgages no longer, and we are ruined! Even this house of Wilmothurst may have to pass to him, and we shall have to go—to go——"

"Where, aunt?" asked Emily, becoming roused now, her light blue eyes dilated with wonder, and her nose seeming more *retroussé* than ever.

"God alone knows where; to some obscure watering-place probably. If this insolent fellow, who certainly has not been paid for some years, would only wait till Jerry returns from the Gold Coast, and some arrangements could be made!" continued Lady Julia, in her plaintive and bleating kind of voice. "House, lands, and all will go to Chevenix, and only a few acres will be left us. We are beggars," she continued, with angry querulousness, but without altering a line of her smooth, handsome, and passionless face. "We have nothing of our own—all will become his."

"But surely, aunt, you have friends. There is Lord Twiseldown—there is Sir Jasper Dehorsey."

"I cannot stoop to ask, and who would lend me thousands?—not even money-lenders now, for there is nothing left in the shape of land to borrow on. Wilmothurst will become the property of this upstart farmer's son out and out. Jerry will have to give up everything but his commission, and go to India no doubt. Fortunately he has that resource left him; but I—I shall no longer be able to maintain even you, Emily."

Lady Wilmot's emotions of annoyance and anger at Mr. Chevenix and the whole situation took the form of making her niece smart, while in reality she had no very genuine fear of such an awful crisis coming about, thinking that heaven or fate, or something or other, would never permit a person of her position to be so heavily visited.

"And *what* shall I do, auntie?" asked the young lady, plaintively, but with surprise.

"You may have to go out into the world as a governess or companion."

"Governess or companion! while Bella Chevenix——"

"Will reign here as heiress of Wilmothurst," said Lady Julia, with the first approach to expression on her lineless face—a bitter and scornful smile.

"Oh, it is hard—very hard!"

"Very hard for *me*," added Lady Julia, who, like most of her class, thought chiefly of "number one."

"She will make some good marriage," said Emily, after a pause.

"She is decidedly very handsome, and has, my maid Florine tells me, magnificent hair."

"Handsome?" queried the fair Emily. "Yes, but aunt, this is an age of belladonna, pearl powder, rouge, and heaven knows what more."

"I hope the Gold Coast will have cured Jerry of his foolish fancy for that artful girl."

"Her tastes are decidedly rural. I have been told that she often assists the vicar in visiting the poor, and actually teaches in his school at times."

"Well, she is more in her place there, and acting the village Samaritan, than riding with the Buckhounds, dancing at county and garrison balls, and giving herself the airs of the *habituée du monde*."

Lady Julia had in her arms a Maltese spaniel, a wheezy, fat, and petted cur that often reposed in a mother-of-pearl

basket lined with blue satin, and she was fondling it as she had never fondled Jerry when an infant—a cur that snapped viciously at every one who approached within ten yards of it or her, but which she always apostrophised and talked to as if it had been a human being; and, sooth to say, it was about as human in feeling as this earl's daughter, so far as tenderness and a capacity for loving went—loving any one at least but herself.

“Come, my sweet one, Floss,” she now exclaimed, oblivious suddenly of her approaching woes, and while it was leaping and yapping on her knee she kissed it repeatedly, and said, in a cooing voice: “Did it want to go for a drive on this cold February afternoon? Then its mamma will order the carriage to take it for one.”

If Jerry had never in his tender boyhood been fondled in this manner, how often had he felt in after-life that much of the attention his mother *did* at any time bestow upon him was due less to any maternal instinct or love than to his position and means as Squire of Wilmothurst and to family pride and vanity.

“A letter, my lady,” said a tall footman, presenting one on a salver, and withdrawing noiselessly.

“Another from this man Chevenix already. Again! really, really, what can this person want now?”

She tore it impatiently open, the diamonds on her white fingers sparkling as she did so, and her delicately-pencilled eyebrows were elevated as she read with aristocratic surprise and impatience: “With reference to my letter of this morning about the mortgages, dear Lady Julia, take all the delay you may wish. They shall not be foreclosed till time has soothed the awful blow that has fallen upon you.”

“Blow!” exclaimed Lady Julia. “What blow?—what can the man mean?”

“Read on, auntie—there is something more.”

“The fall of your son so gallantly in Western Africa is a circumstance to be deplored indeed by all—but more than all by those who knew him.”

“Good heavens—good heavens—good heavens!” said Lady Julia thrice, in a low yet fretful voice, as if she scarcely understood the situation; “it is all some dreadful mistake! Jerry—Jerry—a mistake, Emily. I saw nothing of it in the *Post* or *Times* this morning.”

She was trembling excessively now, and Emily's eyes were full of hot welling tears. Neither of the ladies had seen the

fatal intelligence from the seat of war, for, as they read only the fashionable intelligence, they had heeded transactions on the Gold Coast as much as they did those that may be occurring in the mountains of the moon.

However, to do them justice, both were thunderstruck—impressed as much as it was in their frozen nature to be—when Emily, after rushing for the morning paper, found the brief telegram or paragraph to which, no doubt, Mr. Chevenix referred :

“Coomassie in flames. Army falling back on the Gold Coast; but the rivers rising fast. Chief casualties—Captain Dalton, Rifles, severely wounded; Captain J. Wilmot, ditto, killed and carried off by the enemy.”

The fashionable aunt and niece, at whose pleasant doors grief and sorrow seldom or never came, sat for a time as if stunned. Chevenix and his mortgages were alike forgotten; they could but think of Jerry and strive to realise the—to them—almost impossible situation, while the dull and depressing afternoon stole on.

How could it be, or why was it, that Jerry, so jolly and manly—the son of such a cold and feeble-minded woman of rank and fashion, who had done her best, but failed, to spoil or pamper him—was reserved for such a fate as this !

He had escaped the battle of Amoaful, the passage of the Prah, the fighting prior to the capture of Coomassie, and all the perils of death by fever and toil to perish thus, when the wretched end had been achieved and the troops must have been on their homeward way.

Poor Jerry ! The life of the mess and the life of Wilmothurst when at home, where, in consideration of his five feet ten inches and irreproachable moustache, he had been latterly permitted to be termed a “son,” and not, as his mother would have wished, a “boy.”

Lady Julia Wilmot had never posed in society save as a beauty, and the great consideration that was ever shown her was due to that beauty and her birth and position as an earl’s daughter; but not to any brilliant qualities of head—still less of amiability of heart. Thus in many ways she was a fair average example of “the upper ten.”

So now it may be said of her and Cousin Emily on this disastrous occasion :

Some natural tears they shed, but wip’d them soon.

And their first thoughts were of a suitable and handsome tablet to Jerry's memory in the vicarage church, and of fashionable mourning for themselves and the household. It would all cast a gloom over their return to town after Easter in March, when a "brief season" would commence—if they went to town at all, for "thank Heaven," added Lady Julia, "no one shall accuse me of not doing my duty to my son. I shall order my mourning at Jay's, and certainly will not wear one of those frightful bonnets with long--what is it now, John?"

A tall footman, with a face of woe made up for the occasion, and a manner adapted to it—for the news had spread like wildfire over all the house and vicinity, and when many genuine tears were shed in the servants' hall, where Jerry was a prime favourite with the women folks—brought in a card announcing:

"Miss Chevenix."

"Chevenix again—this is intolerable! Did you say not at home?"

"I said you were engaged—severially indisposed, my lady," he replied, shaking his cauliflower-looking head solemnly.

"Yet—she would come in?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And at a time like this—when we are plunged in unutterable woe! Such confident assurance!"

The door was thrown open, and Bella Chevenix came swiftly forward as the servant withdrew.

But in this we are anticipating a little.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"THOUGHTS THAT OFTEN LIE TOO DEEP FOR TEARS."

LIKE the again partially widowed Laura, Bella Chevenix had watched with an aching heart the progressive news of the war among barbarians on the burning Gold Coast, from the landing on New Year's Day to the battle of Amoafu, the passage of the Prah, and the victorious advance on Coomassie; and now came the sudden shock and horror by a tantalisingly brief telegram, in the upper corner of a newspaper, headed by a sensational title in large type, but three lines, announcing that the

two officers had fallen—Dalton severely wounded, and Wilmot killed and carried off by the enemy!

Bella sat for a time as one turned to stone, incapable even of tears—oppressed and crushed down by the one appalling and apparently unrealisable thought.

“Jerry dead—Jerry dead—and I shall never see him more!”

Jerry, so full of life and fun and jollity! It seemed incredible. And yet, why so? He only ran the risks that many others were running. But the mind of Bella went painfully back to their parting, when mutual doubts of the purity and honesty of each other’s intentions—doubts born of the existence of those horrible mortgages—had mutually fettered their tongues, especially so far as *she* was concerned, and, when they separated, little dreaming that it was for ever—separated with a simply repeated “good-bye” and a lingering pressure of the hand, while no kiss, no embrace, no promise were exchanged, and he was going away to be done to death in that savage land; and she remembered how she wept floods of unavailing tears as the last sounds of his footsteps died away. Poor fellow! And now she should see him no more—never again!

To Bella Chevenix, sorrow, repentance, and love were alike useless, so far as Jerry Wilmot was concerned. To the girl, just then, it seemed as if the dream of her life was over and done; in it no other could replace Jerry; the light had gone for ever out of her world now. She threw herself upon her knees, in the solitude of her chamber, in a passionate burst of grief—the brilliant, beautiful, and once happy Bella—and strove to say “Thy will be done,” but the genuine submission thereto could only come by-and-by.

Under the circumstances of Jerry’s profession and career, some peril, some suffering were not altogether unlooked-for or undreaded; but that he should be killed and carried off by the dreadful Ashantees, of whom she had very vague yet terrible idea indeed, had been beyond her calculations—beyond her worst anticipations! She felt dazed, miserable—intensely, and confused.

“I am now sure that he loved me well—well and dearly—and how coldly I parted with him! Oh, Jerry, my darling, can it be that I shall never see you again?” Thus she said to herself over and over in sad reiteration, though no sound but sighs left her lips.

Anon she rose and paced her room, with half-uttered excla-

mations of anguish and sorrow ; and then she would throw herself on her bed, burying her face in her hands, in mute and tearless agony. To think that he was gone—in his grave, if he ever found one—gone without the memory of a kind word from her that would make her future life less bitter.

“ Oh, Jerry—dead—dead ! ” she murmured, with ceaseless reiteration.

She had a craving for such sympathy as her father, who was to a great extent ignorant of all that had passed between her and Jerry, could not yield her, and she resolved to visit Laura.

She staggered from the bedside to her toilette-table, and when she looked into the glass she was surprised by the frozen-like despair she saw in her own beautiful face, which was as colourless as Carrara marble now. She bathed her eyes, made a hasty toilette of the most sable things she could select, tied a thick black veil over her face, and, ordering her pony phaeton, set out to visit Laura, to whom the dire tidings had come, of course, betimes, and she too was overwhelmed by affliction that, however, was not without hope.

She was alone now, most terribly alone at Chilcote Grange. Little Netty had been sent to a West End finishing school that she might acquire all sorts of accomplishments and graces with which to delight her father on his return ; and now perhaps poor Tony Dalton might die by the banks of the Prah and never see England again, for the heat of the horrible climate there made all wounds more perilous.

“ Wounded, severely wounded,” Laura had been repeating to herself : but where wounded, she speculated—how, and with what, and in what part of the poor mortal frame.

The telegram was horribly brief and vague ! And now though Laura and Bella Chevenix had few notes to compare, and could say nothing to comfort each other, they gathered some from the communion of tears and thoughts and sorrows.

Laura drew forth—as she had done a score of times before—Dalton’s letters to her from Madeira, the Gold Coast, and sent by more than one homeward-bound ship ; and the affection they breathed for her and Netty filled her soul with great gratitude now, *whatever* might happen. She had never received letters from him before—even in their early lover days at St. Leonards long ago, before their years of separation came : and how strange it was to have received letters from him, conceived

in the tenor of these, and signed "Your affectionate husband, Tony Dalton."

Now he and Laura were quite old enough to know their own minds, and to deplore the separation a previous less knowledge of each other had brought about between them; neither was likely to make any more false steps, from rashness or impulse, and they had a fair promise of a delicious companionship for the future if they were spared to meet again, and the perils of the Gold Coast ever became a thing of the past; but that fair promise hung by a thread—now.

"Had we never met more—met as we did so singularly by the sudden arrival of his regiment in Aldershot," said Laura, "and I loved or compelled him, poor darling, to love me again, I might have gone on to the end of my days nursing a sickly sentimental memory on one hand, with a species of revengeful memory on the other; but, if we never meet more on this side of the grave, I shall—till carried to mine—remember with gratitude that he had learned to love me well, and Netty too, before we lost him for ever."

All her natural gaiety and much of her *aplomb* had left Laura on the day Dalton sailed for Southampton, and now she was as crushed in spirit as a poor woman well could be. "We love because we have loved," says a novelist, "and it is easier to go on in the old routine, even when all the real life and beauty have died out of it, than to break with the mere *memory* of that time which made our life holy and beautiful to us."

In the time of this strange enforced separation—in the time of Dalton's actual desertion of Laura, and when she knew not whether he was dead or living till she met him at Aldershot—this had been something of the sentiment that inspired her; but now that they had both known and loved each other anew under better auspices, and been so briefly re-united, a contemplation of the catastrophe that might happen wrung Laura's heart to the core.

On leaving the latter, Bella, though still a prey to choking grief, in the warm and generous impulse of her nature, conceived the idea of, or thought she might find some comfort in, a visit to Lady Wilmot. She was *his* mother, whose grief at least could not be inferior to her own.

She committed to oblivion all that lady's treatment of herself in the past time, and even but lately at the Charity Bazaar; yet it was not without some misgivings, and even pausings in

her progress once or twice, that she turned the heads of her pretty ponies in the direction of Wilmothurst, her tears falling hotly under her thick Shetland veil as she passed down the stately avenue and through the Chase, where every foot of the way suggested some memory of Jerry and his happy boyhood, when they were playmates till he went to Eton, and Lady Julia—well, never permitted *her* name to be on the ordinary visitors' list. There was a tall elm up which he had clambered, at the risk of his limbs, to get her a magpie's nest ; here they had gathered the early primroses in April, and the Lent lilies in May, or hunted for butterflies. How often had they played croquet together on the bowling-green, and rowed dreamily for hours on the tree-shaded river ; and at every turn the figure of the boy seemed to come before her, mingled with that of the moustached and handsome young officer to whom she so strangely bade farewell.

Full of these thoughts, Bella would not be repelled by the conventional manner or replies of the footman, and begged so earnestly to see Lady Julia that she was ushered into her presence by the former, as we have described in the last chapter.

Poor Bella had but one thought—Lady Julia was *his* mother, and gladly in that hour of woe would she have thrown her arms around her and embraced her tenderly ; but Lady Julia was cold and calm in aspect and bearing as a Greek marble statue, and received her visitor without rising, and with a brief conventional pressure with one hand while motioning her to be seated with the other.

Whatever hopes Cousin Emily once had of Jerry for a husband—hopes often crushed by his indifference on the subject, and by a knowledge of the necessity that he must marry “money”—they were gone now ; and, besides, she could receive Bella Chevenix now with more equanimity than hitherto.

But her reception was common-place—chilling also—and poor Bella, feeling herself *de trop*, an utter intruder, felt confusion blend with the grief that oppressed her.

“After the awful news of this morning, Lady Julia,” said she, with a great effort, “as an old friend of the family, whose ancestors have been for years upon the estate, as a neighbour, too, in a lonely part of the county—more than all—all—as—as—I conceived a great craving to see you,” said the girl, brokenly, in a weak, yet exquisitely sweet voice.

"Indeed—thanks."

This was not an encouraging response, nevertheless Bella spoke again.

"Jerry Wilmot, I mean—and I were such playmates in our childhood long, long ago, that—that—you know——"

Bella's voice completely failed her under the cold inquiring eyes of Lady Julia and Emily Wilmot.

"Playmates!" said the former. "Yes, your memory does you credit. I thought you must have forgotten all that by this time, as I am sure my poor dear boy did."

"Forgotten!"

"Yes, I think I heard him say something like that to his friend, Captain Goring."

"If he spoke of those pleasant times, he would scarcely have forgotten them," was the natural response of Bella, to whom Lady Julia, after a languid stare, said: "Next mail must bring some distinct details of this calamity that has fallen upon me and Miss Wilmot."

Bella felt that she was excluded from the co-partnery of grief—she who loved the dead as she loved her own soul, and more, and she was almost, in spite of herself, tempted to daringly enter some little protest when Lady Julia spoke again.

"I wish Captain Goring were at home; I should send for him. By the way, does not rumour say he has succeeded to a fortune?"

"To £20,000 a year," replied Bella, in a low voice.

"Say £10,000—that will be nearer the mark, perhaps £5,000."

"Why?"

"I believe very little that I see, and always but the half of what I hear," she replied, fanning herself.

"How can this woman think of such matter just *now*?" thought Bella, an emotion of resentful bitterness growing in her heart. "Oh, how little did she deserve to have such a son as my darling Jerry!"

The snapping and snarling of Floss, who always resented the advent of visitors, now required all Lady Julia's kisses and blandishments to soothe him into the recess of his mother-of-pearl basket; and to Bella it seemed monstrous, incredible, her bearing. Only this morning these women heard of the dire calamity, and they were to all appearance as "cool as cucumbers"—a little redness they exhibited about the eyes certainly,

and a certain subdued manner alone seemed to show that they had in any way laid to heart the death of the poor fellow whose obsequies might have been performed by the birds of the wilderness.

Doubtless Bella failed to understand the highly born and long descended ; yet in many a gallant field, against both Scots and French, long before even the days of the great Civil War, had her ancestors done good and true yeoman service, with bow and bill, for their acres at Langley Park, under the banner of the Wilmots, with its three eagles' heads—*sable and argent*.

At last she rose.

"It is well for you, Lady Julia," said she, "that you are able to take this awful dispensation of Providence so calmly as you do."

"When a thing is inevitable or irreparable, it is best to bow the head and accept it with a good grace," replied the bereaved mother, closing her fan, but not rising from the fauteuil on which she was reclining, looking gentle and soft, yet iron-bound and icily conventional.

"The loss of an only son, and *such* a son?" exclaimed Bella, indignation mingling with her grief, as she burst into a flood of irrepressible tears, on which Lady Julia gave her a stare of well-bred astonishment, and asked : "What do *you* mean, Miss Chevenix, by this excessive emotion? Have you lost any relation recently that you come almost in black, and with these jet ornaments?"

"No—but I thought—I thought——" stammered Bella.

"You thought—what?"

"That for poor Jerry——"

"Do you *mean* Captain Wilmot—my son?" asked Lady Julia, icily.

"Yes," replied Bella, boldly enough now ; "we were such old and good friends that I thought—a little change of dress was but becoming reverence to his memory ; and I shall make it deeper still."

"As you please," said Lady Julia, bowing curtly, while Cousin Emily rang the bell, and bowed the visitor out.

The two ladies then stared at each other.

There was a *deduction* to be drawn from honest Bella's deep, pathetic, and unconcealed interest and grief for the poor dead fellow that proved somewhat offensive to Lady Julia, who, amid her own sorrow—or what she considered such—had been

considering the fashion of her own mourning—of mourning for the entire household—and of a handsome quartered hatchment to "hang upon the outward wall;" thus she was rather astounded and indignant at the rash or adopted bearing in one of Bella's rank and position; but they savoured, she thought, somewhat of the servants' hall in demonstrativeness.

She was ashamed as yet to consult her *Dressmakers' Album*, even with the aid of Emily and Mademoiselle Florine, anent the most becoming fashion of mourning; but to-morrow she would certainly do so.

"*Assurément, oui!*" thought Florine.

Anger and no small degree of contempt were in the heart of Bella as she quitted the park gates of Wilmothurst, with a kind of dull and sodden despair mingling therein, as she drove her ponies home in the February twilight to her father's house that overlooked the village green, and she thought how true were the words of Wordsworth of

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

CHAPTER L.

"OH, FOR A HORSE WITH WINGS."

JERRY lay long when we left him last in a state of semi-unconsciousness, thoughts of his past life rather than of his present most perilous and deplorable predicament hovering in his mind. He sometimes imagined himself at the mess, and heard the voices and saw the faces of Goring, Dalton, Frank Fleming, and others; anon he was in the Long Valley at Aldershot skirmishing with his company, or riding a hurdle-race by Twesildown Hill. Then came dreams of the ball at Wilmothurst and of Bella Chevenix in all her beauty, and his cold, pale, passionless mother. Again he was in the playing-fields at Eton—again chosen stroke of the Oxford boat. All these floated before him with an overwhelming sense of pain in his head, as once again he struggled back to the world and a full sense of the awful horror of his situation came upon him.

Thankful we may be that, as Pope has it,

Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed, their present state.

The prospect of Jerry's future made his heart seem to die within him.

The sun was shining brightly now, and save the loud hum of insect life no sound was in the air or around him. A heavy odour of burnt wood and of moist thatch came upon the passing wind from where the fires of the past night were still smouldering in Coomassie, and once more staggering up Jerry looked around him.

He was alone—left in the bush to perish ; and his comrades, where were they ? ”

Miles on the happy homeward march to the coast, with the swollen rivers all unbridged and impassable in their rear !

He saw it all—he felt it all, and knew that he was a lost man. Feeble, defenceless, and single-handed he would fall a victim to the first savage and infuriated Ashantee he met, and his skull would soon be laid as an ornament—a royal trophy—at the foot of the king.

A heavy moan escaped poor Jerry ; but the love of life, the instinct of self-preservation is strong in human nature, and his first thought was to endeavour to follow the army.

At a pool he bathed his head and face, washed away the plastered blood that encrusted all the vicinity of the wound on his head, and bound the latter up with his handkerchief. He luckily found his light helmet in the hollow where he had lain unseen by his comrades, and, after giving a glance to the chambers of his loaded revolver, endeavoured to follow as closely as he could the track that led he knew towards the army—the track the latter must have trodden.

But he frequently lost it, vast swamps and sheets of water were formed now where none had been before, and he had to make harassing *détours* ; his powers and his steps were feeble, thus his progress was slow and often doubtful, and ever and anon he had to pause and look around him, fearing that in the dingles of the woody wilderness he might see the dark and agile figure of a hostile savage.

Midday came when he was certain that he could have made but a very few miles of progress, and gasping with heat, giddy and weary, he crept under the shadow of a dense leafy bush to rest and conceal himself.

Could he have been certain of the route, he knew that it would have been safer to travel by night, but in the night he must fail to see the traces of it, and now, with weariness and

pain, a great horror of the whole situation came upon him, and he could but mutter again and again: "Alone—alone in the bush—to die! God help me!"

Poor Jerry was a popular, light-hearted, prosperous, and happy young fellow, whom everyone liked and to whom pleasant things happened every day. He was wont to own that he found everyone kind and everyone nice, and in society, of course, he met many people. Wherever Jerry had gone, at school, at college, or with the Rifles, he converted strangers into acquaintances, and acquaintances soon became his friends. Wherever he went invitations to dinners, balls, drums, lawn-tennis, and other parties flowed upon him, for he was decidedly a popular young fellow, with the girls especially.

All that seemed ended!

To Jerry, accustomed as he had been to the sunny side of life, and to float without a thought upon its rippling and glittering current, there was something worse than death in his present predicament. He could understand being shot in action, and then being buried in a hole or left unburied to the fowls of the air, but this struggle against destruction—this living death—was utterly beyond all his calculations!

He partook sparingly of the contents of his haversack, reflecting the while on what must inevitably ensue when the last of that support for exhausted nature was expended, for he could not escape a death by starvation even if he escaped death by other means.

Without food, without comrades, without help or means to cross the swollen rivers! The perspiration burst in beads upon his temples; his pulsation caused the aching of his contused wound to become agony; his muscles grew rigid, he set his teeth, and began to surmise how long he would last—how long he could endure all that must be before him now, while muttering again: "Alone in the bush to die—God help me!"

He had in his haversack rations for three days; even if he could make them last for seven, his resource would end then; and, even while sheltered by the giant leaves which abounded there, the baleful night dews might induce fever and ague, while the waters that barred his progress were more likely to rise than to fall, as the rainy season, which had made Sir Garnet Wolseley begin his sudden retreat, had now commenced.

Tidings that he had perished would soon be telegraphed to England; many there, he knew, would regret him; with some-

thing of a bitter smile he remembered the farewell parting with his cold aristocratic mother, and then the thought of Bella perhaps becoming—for she was known to be rich—the bride of the horsey Lord Twesildown.

The thought of that nerved him to exertion ; the sun was verging westward now, and once more, with feeble steps and slow he took to the track again, half blinded at times by the crimson glare of light that poured between the stems of the trees, for the track he had to pursue was then straight in the wake of the setting sun.

He could form no idea of the distance he had gone, but the odour of burned wood which reached him from time to time warned him that he was still unpleasantly near Coomassie, and more than once sounds that came upon the wind like a savage shout and the distant beating of a war-drum, made him creep into the jungle for concealment, and thus lose time, when, if he would hope to overtake the army, now many miles on their homeward way, every moment was most precious.

At last, when night, with tropical swiftmess, had descended, he found his progress hopelessly barred by that great sheet of water which we have already referred to—a reach of five hundred yards in breadth that rolled now at a place through which in advancing the army had passed dry-shod.

“Out of the running!” exclaimed poor Jerry, using his home phraseology ; “oh, heavens ! how to bridge this sea that lies between me and the troops ? Oh, for a horse with wings!” he added, unconsciously quoting the exclamation of Cymbeline.

When night fell no resource was left him but to remain there and gaze with haggard eyes and a desponding heart at the cruel sheet of water that lay between him and probable safety.

Brightly, as on the New Year’s night that saw the troops landing on that fatal shore, the moon was shining now—brighter even ; never had Jerry seen such brilliancy. In all the vast expanse of the firmament overhead there was not a vestige of cloud. Millions of stars were there, but their splendour was dimmed or obscured by the splendid effulgence of the moon. The vast leaves of plants, whose names were all unknown to the lost Jerry, were shining in dew as if diamonds had rained from heaven ; every giant cotton-tree and palm, every rock and fissure were illuminated, and the birds flew to and fro as if a new day had dawned, but a day of silver, icy-like splendour,

and clear as in a mirror were the shadows of the trees and graceful palms reflected downward in the sheet of water that glittered in the sheen.

But that he was so weary and faint, Jerry would have availed himself of this wonderful moonlight and endeavoured to get round the flank of the vast sheet of water that barred his progress, and which reflected the radiance like a mighty sheet of crystal; but he was compelled to wait till morning, and again sought shelter under some jungly bushes.

Near the place he saw several broken meat tins and empty bottles scattered about, indicating where some of our troops had halted before the final march was made into Coomassie; and he regarded with interest and anxiety these vestiges which proved that he was in the right track could he but cross the intervening flood.

With his very existence trembling in the balance with fate, what a small matter now seemed the mortgages over Wilmot-hurst and every consideration, save the love of Bella Chevenix; and while he strove to court sleep—oblivion in that savage wilderness, where no sound met the ear save the plash of falling dew as some overcharged leaf bent downward, his whole soul was full of her image—the image of her he too probably should never, never see again.

With earliest dawn he was again afoot and seeking to get round the reach of water, but it trended away through hollows far to the north and south, yet with an aching heart he struggled manfully at his task. On every hand, towered up to the height of 250 feet or more, straight as stone columns, the cotton-trees, like the giants of primeval vegetation, and round their bases flourished the wondrous undergrowth of jungle, under which again grew white lilies, pink flowers, and dog roses; amid which could be heard sharp trumpetings of enormous mosquitoes, with the monotonous too-too of the wild doves, which alone broke the silence of the bush.

"This silence," wrote one who served in the campaign, "this apparently never-ending forest, this monotony of rank vegetation, this absence of a breath of wind to rustle a leaf, becomes oppressive, and the feeling is not lessened by the dampness and heaviness of the air, and by the malarious exhalation and odour of decaying vegetation which rise from the swamps."

The report of a musket at no great distance, followed by

the noise made by some wounded animal crashing through the forest, compelled Jerry, with a heart that beat wildly with agitation and alarm, to conceal himself instantly ; and he had hardly done so, when four armed Ashantees, with muscular, mahogany-coloured forms, gleaming eyes, and shining teeth, passed near him and continued to hover about, as if scouting or in pursuit of game.

This compelled him to lie for hours *en perdu*, and evening began to close again without his having got round the reach of water that lay between him and the way to Prah, and even if he ever did reach the banks of that stream how was he to cross it?—for he was not a swimmer.

On this night there was no moon, for the clouds were densely massed in the heavens ; the rain fell in torrents, and though sheltered therefrom in the hollow of a rock, Jerry listened to the crashing sound of the vast drops falling in a ceaseless shower, with a species of dull despair, for higher than ever would the waters rise now ; his food was failing him, and he gave himself up for utterly lost.

With dawn the rain departed, and the sun exhaled a dense steamy mist from the drenched forest ; but Jerry dared not leave his lair, for more than once in the distance he heard distinctly cries, strange sounds, and the explosion of firearms, showing evidently that scouting parties of Ashantees were hovering about, if it were not their whole army following up ours, which must be, he knew, at a vast distance then.

He had now come to his last biscuit, and finding all still when night fell he again addressed himself to the task of attempting to ford the water at a place where it seemed shallow. The sky was again cloudy, veiling most of the stars, and the moon had not yet risen.

At that point the forest was open for a great space, and luxuriant grass and reed-like rushes covered all the soil. Weak and weary, stiff and sore, though he had lurked in concealment all day, he staggered like a drunken man as he approached the water, but ere he could enter it some uncertain sounds made him look behind. He saw the gleam of arms, the flash of steel in the starlight ; and, then coming upon him at a rush, apparently were some twenty men, emerging swiftly from the forest he had left ; and though he drew his sword and grasped his revolver, resolved to sell his life bitterly and dearly, so enfeebled was his frame, and so great was the shock—the

horror—he experienced at the prospect of the terrible death which so surely awaited him, after all he had endured and undergone, that he fell prone on his face and scarcely remembered more, as they closed in wild tumult around him.

CHAPTER LI.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT.

“Twa heads are better than ane, though they are but sheep’s anes,” remarked Archie Auchindoir, with a smirk on his wrinkled face, to old Mrs. Prune, as he gave her a lesson in the art of cooking mutton to imitate venison, with minced onions and ham, parsley and port wine, to please the fastidious palate of his ailing master Sir Ranald, who dearly doted on many things he could not procure now, and of course longed for venison. So these two old servitors were again to their joy installed with the little household once more at Chilcote.

And most welcome again to Alison was old silver-haired Archie, with his genuine ancient Scottish fidelity “to the auld family”—a species of fidelity as beautiful and unselfish as it is rare now-a-days.

Mr. Solomon Slagg had failed to let Chilcote; the ruse under which Sir Ranald and Cadbury had lured Alison to accompany them in a sudden departure from England in the *Firefly* had failed, so there was no reason why they should not return; thus Sir Ranald and his daughter had returned accordingly.

Daisy Prune’s mother had soon restocked the hen-house, and her old occupations came pleasantly back to Alison. At present she was full of one thing and another; home was home again; her plants, her greenhouse, her flowers occasioned many a deep consultation with the factotum of the establishment, old Archie, anent slips, bulbs, and seedlings, for her love of flowers amid all her cares and anxieties had never deserted her.

So father and daughter were back again to homelier fare than that of the Hôtel St. Antoine, for their dessert after dinner, if served upon the scanty remains of ancient plate, often consisted of only two bald dishes of oranges and a few little biscuits.

In her singleness and simplicity of heart, Alison rejoiced to be again amid her familiar surroundings, as she was destitute of her father's spirit and futile repining regrets for the unattainable; thus every bit of furniture looked an old friend, more particularly those relics of Essilmont, the family portraits, some of which—especially those of two handsome cavalier brothers who fell in battle for King Charles—seemed to the girl's fancy to relax their haughty features, and smile a welcome home to her—the last of the Cheynes—as she nestled with one of Mudie's last novels in her favourite window-seat and strove to read, while her thoughts wandered to Bevil Goring, wherever he might be, and she pined for him but in vain.

Lord Cadbury was in town just then. Her father had not seen fit to enlighten her as to the circumstance of Goring having followed them to Antwerp, a fact which would have enhanced his interest in the eyes of Alison. Of the Cadbury episode, and the meeting which never came off at the Laurent, he knew nothing; but he was old-fashioned enough and high-spirited enough to have revolted at such cowardice, if he had been aware of it.

Alison speculated deeply. If Bevil Goring was in England, how was it that he made no effort to trace her? Could it be that, stung by her father's imperious manner, and hopeless of ever being rich enough to please him, he had relinquished her and her love, and perhaps given himself up to the adoration of another? She had heard and read of such things, and these surmises saddened and agitated her.

Laura had left Chilcote Grange, none knew for where: thus Alison could not learn from her any knowledge of Goring's movements, or whether he was at camp or in Africa. She was, in her isolation, without the means of knowing if he were in the land of the living.

So she was back again to Chilcote and monotony, but a monotony that was not without an infusion of hope that she might ere long hear something of her lover; for Chilcote and its vicinity were full of associations connected with him, particularly their trysting-place, the old beeches that were leafless still, and looked so lonely when she lingered there, and watched the brown rabbits scudding among the last year's ferns; back again to old Mrs. Prune's frugal repasts, and watching for letters that never came, or those that were not wanted—letters in blue envelopes, at the sight of which Sir Ranald shivered,

He hated all letters; of what use were they to anyone?—all he wanted was his morning paper.

Severely ailing now, the old man had become more querulous than ever, and more than ever was Alison sweet in temper, gentle and patient with him, for she had more than an intuition that she would not have him long with her, and when he passed away what was to become of her *then*?

And then she would look up beseechingly at the portraits of the two brothers—the Ranald and Ellon of other times—as if seeking succour or counsel from them.

“I wish I had been born, papa, when these two kinsmen lived, and when the world was younger,” she said one day.

“A strange thought for a young girl,” he replied; “if you had been born then you would have lived in stormy times, and, instead of living now, be lying in St. Mary’s Kirk at Ellon. But why this wish?”

“Because I think people were truer and more single-hearted then than they are now—more simple, honest, and less inclined to make shams of themselves for appearance sake.”

“Hum,” said Sir Ranald after a pause, during which he had been eyeing her suspiciously through his gold *pince-nez*; “have you met anyone during your protracted walk this afternoon?”

“Whom have I to meet in this lonely place, papa?” she asked, with a little pang of annoyance in her breast.

“No one you think worth your attention now, perhaps; but you were most anxious to return here, anyway.”

Alison did not reply, but a sigh escaped her. She had indeed on that afternoon wandered pretty far on the road that led to the distant camp at Aldershot, in the slight hope of meeting *him* of whom her thoughts were full, and to whom—in ignorance of where he was—she feared to write announcing that she was again at Chilcote.

Winter had come and gone while she was at Antwerp; the snowdrops had faded from white to yellow and passed away. The loose petals of the late crocuses, golden and purple, had also disappeared under the increasing heat of the sunshine; the garden was fragrant with wallflower and scented jonquils, and as the days began to lengthen the pale primroses came to spot the turf under the old beech-trees, and within the green whorls of leaves. Ere long the hedge-banks were gay with them among the litter of dead foliage, and Alison thought of

the days when she was wont to linger and make posies of them as she went to school.

The sum that was to have been settled on Alison in case Bevil fell in the intended duel with Lord Cadbury had not taken any tangible form, as the duel never came off in the first place, and, in the second, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, & Scrawly at that precise time had been unable to discover the actual whereabouts of the young lady; so she was in ignorance of his kind consideration and lover-like generosity, while they waited for fresh instructions.

But aware that to one so impecunious as Sir Ranald Cheyne money could never come amiss, Bevil Goring contrived, through the Scottish legal agents of the former, to transmit to his bankers for the use of Alison a sum anonymously, or in such a fashion that they could never discover, save from himself, from whom or whence it came.

And the news thereof arrived one morning when the holders of some overdue accounts had been more than usually clamorous for settlement, and Alison had begun to feel once again some of the old emotions of shame and desperation in her heart as in the past, and her eyes were full of unshed tears.

"What a world it is!" groaned Sir Ranald.

"True, papa; yet it is but little we require or wish for."

"We can neither have what we require or may wish for, unless—unless——"

"What, papa?"

"We have money," said he gloomily.

"True. Oh, that weary money!" sighed the girl. "However, we have still five pounds in the bank, and in my purse are a sovereign and some silver."

"My poor obstinate pet! How easily all this might be amended! A dun, of course," he added, as the postman's rattle was heard at the door, and Archie brought in a letter. "Ah! I thought so," muttered the poor baronet, as he saw that the envelope was a blue one. "Throw it in the fire; they are all alike."

However, with a snort of impatience, he opened the missive, and as he read it, Alison, who was watching his thin face with affectionate anxiety, saw an expression of blank wonder, of utter amazement, steal over it. He started, and, as if he could not believe his eyes, wiped his *pince-nez* with his handkerchief and read the letter again, while Alison, whose

birthday it was, and who sighed a little because there was no one to remember it, stole to his side and peeped over his shoulder. It was from the secretary of Sir Ranald's bank, to announce that, by some friend unknown, £1,000 had been paid in the name of Miss Alison Cheyne for her use and behoof, and as a *birthday* gift.

Surprise profound and great joy were the first emotions of father and daughter, and the latter thought of all the little debts it would clear, and the comforts it would procure for the former; but neither had the slightest suspicion of the real donor, for Goring was supposed to have little more than his pay, and both were inclined to accredit Lord Cadbury with it; thus for a time a perilous emotion of deep gratitude began really to fill the affectionate heart of Alison—we say perilous, for it enhanced the prospects of the peer, and might eventually blight those of Goring, if aught occurred to make Alison question his truth or loyalty to herself, and yet her heart shrank with shame at taking a money gift from her rejected lover.

A birthday gift, she thought; Lord Cadbury did not know her birthday. Bevil did; but of course this princely and certainly opportune present could never come from poor Bevil, who was thankful to add to his income by slaving as a musketry instructor.

Beyond Cadbury conjecture was endless.

"Can it be from Captain Llanyard?" she suggested.

"Absurd!" said her father, almost angrily.

Tom Llanyard, she knew with all a pretty girl's sharp intuition, had admired her greatly and secretly during the brief voyage in the *Firefly*, and Tom, we are glad to record, had, singular to say, in one day realised a handsome fortune.

Alison knew of that circumstance, and she knew too that Cadbury was too innately vulgar not to be ostentatious with his wealth and disinclined to hide his candle under a bushel.

Tom Llanyard, with the *Firefly*, when taking her to Cowes by Lord Cadbury's orders, had been blown by a foul wind and in a heavy gale thereof down the Channel till he was off the coast of Devonshire, where he fell in with a large derelict Indiaman, which had been abandoned by her captain and crew during the gale, and of which he took possession.

He brought her into Dartmouth safely, and she proved to be laden with teakwood, rum, and a cargo valued generally at nearly £100,000, consequently the salvage alone proved a

handsome fortune to worthy Tom Llanyard, who immediately resigned "the honour" of commanding Lord Cadbury's yacht.

The proud spirit of Alison revolted, on consideration, at the idea of accepting or using this money; but her father only asked her how they were to "rub on" without it, now it had come?

But whence came it? Was it sent in charity, or was it the conscience money of some false friend, who in the spendthrift past time had wronged her father on the turf or elsewhere?

To soothe her, he was not disinclined to adopt this view of the matter; but to suit his own views he again fell back upon the conviction that the donor could be no other than Lord Cadbury, to return it to whom would be an insult, and whom it would be but proper to thank in some fashion.

Thus, great was the surprise of the peer to receive one day at his club a rather effusive letter from Alison, dictated by Sir Ranald to thank him for the birthday gift—as they could not doubt—a gift that nothing but her father's failing health, and the many necessities that it involved, compelled her to accept. Her little hands trembled as she closed this—to her—obnoxious epistle; while her eyes were dim with tears, and her heart wrung with shame and pride, all the more so as she painfully recalled the episode of Mr. Slagg and the acceptances.

Cadbury was puzzled sorely; he knew not what to think, and tugged away at his long white moustache, while thinking "*who* the devil can have sent this money—a thousand pounds, too!"

He was not sorry that they should think the gift came from him.

"Hang it all!" he muttered, "have I not spent ever so much more on and about her—Slagg's devilish bills too—and all for nothing!"

So he wrote a very artful answer, expressing his surprise that he should be thanked for such a trifle, thus fully permitting her to infer that the gift was a kindness of his own; and more than ever did Alison feel a humiliation, in which her father—selfish with all his pride—had no share, especially when sipping some very choice dry Cliquot "*veuve*," a case of which he had ordered on the head of it, and thought that for a little time at least he had bidden good-bye to *mouton à la Russe*, cold beef, and apple-dumpling—ugh!

At his club and elsewhere in London, Cadbury had a ner-

vous fear of the Antwerp affair, and the cause of his sudden departure from that city, oozing out. It might find its way from the *Rag*, of which he doubted not Goring was a member, but Cadbury forgot that the former was too much of a gentleman to tell any anecdote that would involve the name of a lady—more than all, that of Alison Cheyne.

But no one can tell how stories get about in these days, and thus, when there was any low-voiced talk or laughter in a corner of the club-room, he grew hot and cold with the terrible suspicion that he was the subject of both. His hatred of Goring grew deeper, and he resolved that he would work him some fatal mischief, if he could.

Through Sir Jasper Dehorney and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, a rumour certainly was spread abroad that he had been on the Continent “with such a stunning girl”; and old Cad (as he was often called) was rather inclined to adopt the soft impeachment, and the idea that “he was a dog—a gay spark yet—and all that sort of thing, don’t you know.”

But when Dehorney spoke of the affair, he little knew the rank, position, or character of the girl he referred to, and the risks she had run through the brutal selfishness and mischievous spirit of himself and Hawksleigh, when by falsehoods, and in her confusion, they had lured her to the Café au Progrès.

At Chilcote, Archie Auchindoir speedily became master of the news concerning the birthday gift.

“A thousand pounds, my certie, is there as much money in a’ the warld?” he exclaimed. “Troth, Sir Ranald, he that hath routh o’ butter may put it on baith sides o’ his bannock.”

“I don’t know,” said Sir Ranald, peevishly, to Alison, “why I brought that fellow back again. A Caleb Balderstone is an anachronism in nineteenth-century society.”

“He is so good and faithful, papa—dear old Archie.”

“Yes; but, like all such faithful old fellows, he is a shocking tyrant—is too much *au fait* at all one’s private affairs, and deems himself quite a family institution—as much a Cheyne as ourselves.”

But Alison had not the heart to resent Archie’s gladness that the gift—whoever it came from—“would keep the wolf from the door,” as she thought it might keep the black hound too!

Archie had a profound dislike of Lord Cadbury, and once he ventured to say to Alison: “Wi’ a’ his wealth, I’d as soon

see you in your coffin as the Leddy o' Cadbury Court; but anent this," he asked abruptly, in a low voice, "where is Captain Goring?"

Alison coloured, but said, in a low, cooing voice: "Could you find out for me, Archie, like an old dear as you are?"

"I will—I'll ask at the camp, if I tramp every yard o' the way and back again."

"Oh, thank you so much, Archie."

"I would like to see you married to him, missie," said the old man, patting her shoulder.

"Ah, we are too poor yet, Archie," said Alison, but the next remark, while it made her laugh, brought a hot blush to her cheek.

"Owre puir! Hoot, fye! Think o' the Cheynes o' Essilmont, where mony a time a hundred o' your name and mair have had their horses in stall—ilk man boden in effeir o' war?" exclaimed Archie, his old grey eyes flashing as he spoke. "No—it is feeding little mouths ye think o'; but, odds sake, Miss Alison, they'd bring mair gowd in their yellow curls than they'd ever tak' frae ye in bannocks and shoon. God never sends a little mouth into this world without food for it; and, if it is a certain care, it is a sure joy."

So Archie soon discovered that Bevil Goring was not at Aldershot, and, to Alison's joy, that he had not gone to Africa; that the spring drills had not yet commenced, that the battalion was returning home, and that Captain Goring was in London, where, she concluded, he must be idling in ignorance of her movements, and that she was again at Chilcote.

The year of their mutual promise was already passing away. But what did that matter? Never would they love each other the less!

How she longed once again to see Laura Dalton, whose new name and strange story had reached her through the vicar, and amazed her greatly, for she had a sorrowful sense of isolation and helplessness, and this darkened more around her, while heavy illness once more fell upon Sir Ranald, and again the terror came over her that his life would slowly ebb away.

The scathing bitterness of his tongue when he spoke of Goring often made her heart wince, but could provoke no response from her lips, though they often quivered with indignation at his querulous spite. Though Alison was a woman in energy of purpose and power of endeavour, in many ways she

was still like the veriest child—especially in so far as a spirit of reasonable obedience to Sir Ranald went ; and after all, as a writer has it, even in these our days “such monsters as parents indefinitely relentless will sometimes outrage dramatic proprieties ;” so Alison pondered much upon her future, but failed to see a clue to it.

In her present small world she had but one little pleasure—her letters from her namesake, Sister Lisette, the Béguine, full of prayerful wishes, loving expressions, and pretty messages, and often containing little religious pictures, with gracefully worded mementoes in Latin and French.

And thus the days stole away at Chilcote.

CHAPTER LII.

CADBURY REDIVIVUS.

UNABASHED by Alison's steady rejection of his suit, encouraged by the countenance given him by Sir Ranald, who had narrated to him in a letter written in his own feeble and scrawly hand all that had occurred subsequently to his missing Alison in Antwerp, and more than ever encouraged by the latter's missive with reference to the mysterious birthday gift, Lord Cadbury had the bad taste to resume his old footing of more than visitot, and attended by Gaskins, who had now completely recovered, he rode over almost daily from the Court to Chilcote, and was wont to linger long, to the great annoyance of Alison, though Sir Ranald, more ailing and querulous than ever, lay frequently a-bed till nearly noon.

Aware of the trick it could be proved he had, in a spirit of malevolence rather than to serve his master, played Bevil Goring in Antwerp, and his confession thereof in a moment of agony, weakness, and terror, when believing himself to be dying in the Belgian hospital, the rascal Gaskins was very loath to venture within twenty miles of Aldershot camp ; but, while believing certainly that the wronged officer of the Rifles would never be at Cadbury Court, he was less sure that he might not fall upon him in the vicinity of Chilcote ; thus he was greatly relieved when, in reply to some casual remarks, he elicited from Archie that Captain Goring was in London.

So Gaskins felt his shoulders safe as yet.

"Our fare is no gude enough nae doubt for a gentleman like you, Mr. Gaskins," said Archie, as he ushered the dandified groom (whose surtout was girt by a waistbelt and garnished with a rosebud button-hole) into the kitchen, his whole face wearing a contemptuous smirk the while; "but we can aye gi'e a bane o' cauld beef to pyke, wi' a farl o' breid and a cogie o' gude yill, and they are better, ye ken, than sowans, ill-soured, ill-sauted, and sodden."

"What the dooce is he saying, Mrs. Prune?" asked Mr. Gaskins, in sore perplexity, as he carefully wiped his cockaded hat with a white handkerchief.

"Ye kenna what I am saying?" asked Archie, with contemptuous surprise.

"No, Mr. Hackindore, you must excuse me really."

"Out of the world and into Kippen?" said Archie, with a toss of his head.

"And how is Sir Ranald, Mrs. Prune?" asked Gaskins.

"The laird is a wee thing dwining again," said Archie, ere she could reply. "They say aye ailin' ne'er fills the kirkyard; but I'm fearsome at times this is the last blaze o' the candle in the socket," he added, with a little break in his voice.

On the day of this visit Sir Ranald was not visible at all, and Lord Cadbury had Alison all to himself in the little drawing-room, where he was fast resuming his old airs of property and protection, and almost venturing to make what he deemed love in dull and emotionless tones; and Alison, had she not been grieved by her father's condition, and worried by the whole situation, might have laughed at Cadbury's Don Juanesque posing as too absurd.

"I shall never be able to describe to you," said he, for the tenth time, "my profound alarm and grief when I lost you so mysteriously at Antwerp."

"In a place to which I should never have gone."

"Not even with *me*?" he asked softly.

"Not even with you; but I was weary, triste—glad to do anything to forget my own thoughts; but as for your friend Captain Smith——"

"Alison—my dear Miss Cheyne—how often am I to assure you that I know of no such man? If he was a captain, in presuming to call himself a friend of mine, and acting as he did, he deserved the most severe punishment; and let me

assure you that, as we were in Belgium, I should have lost no time in inviting him to breathe the morning air on the ramparts, or anywhere else," added Cadbury, in a valiant tone, even while wincing at the recollection of the invitation he had received for a similar "breather" in the Lunette St. Laurent.

"I thought duels were as much out of fashion as hoops, patches, and hair powder," said Alison, with a little mockery in her tone.

"So did I, by Jove!" responded Cadbury, with some fervour in his tone. Then he added: "And so Sir Ranald will not appear to-day?"

"No—he is too unwell, and it is only when I think of his condition," said Alison, with a quiver of her sweet lip and downcast eyelashes, "I feel such gratitude to the donor of my birthday gift—it has given me so many things for papa that, I am not ashamed to say, I could never have procured."

"And you have got no certainty of *who* sent it to you?" asked Cadbury, with a curious and very artful modulation of voice, as he slightly patted her hand.

"No—though I may strongly suspect," replied Alison, while a painful kind of blush suffused her pale cheek.

"Suspect! Can't you guess, rather?"

"Unless—it was you—or the kindest of friends."

"I do not admit quite that it was; but——"

"Admission or not, it *was* you," said Alison, with emotions of gratitude and humiliation struggling in her proud heart, while her beautiful eyes looked shrinkingly upward to his; "but, oh, my heart tells me with fear, that it may have come too late—too late."

"Do not say so," replied Cadbury, in his kindest tone. "If I have not graces of person to recommend me," he added in a low voice, "I have—it is admitted—great wealth; if that will make you happy, it is yours—and *his*."

"I cannot love you for what you may have, and you cannot love me for what I have only got—a loveless heart."

"But I may love you for what you *are*. There is a writer who tells that 'it is finer to be loved for what you are than for what you have got,' because the looks and money often run away, but *you* remain—unless you die, that is to say."

"Again this detestable subject!" thought Alison.

"I pity the loneliness of the life you lead here," said he, "with your birds, fowls, and flowers only as your companions."

"And better to me as such, than some people can ever be."

Cadbury was silent. There was the old dangerous glitter in his ferret-like eyes, and he tugged at his long white moustaches, but ere he could resume, Alison said: "Excuse me, I must go to papa; I am sure I heard his bell."

So the peer withdrew, only to come next day in "his anxiety about the health of his old friend."

With poor Alison it was too often a case of "out of Scylla and into Charybdis," as her father generally resumed precisely where Cadbury left off.

"Is he gone?" asked Sir Ranald, taking her hand in his thin, wasted, diaphanous fingers, and patting it tenderly on the coverlet of his bed.

"Who, papa?"

"Cadbury. I would speak to you about him again."

She made a little impatient and disdainful *moue* at the name, but her father, heedless of it, resumed: "In the winter of my days I have been compelled to bury myself, and you too, darling, in this dead-alive, man-forgotten place—Chilcote; but I shall soon be out of it, and you—my poor child—you—you——"

His voice failed him, and Alison's heart failed her too as he spoke in this pitiful strain.

"As for loving Lord Cadbury," said Alison, with a voice that seemed full of tears, "do not talk to me of that when you are so ill and feeble, as it wrings my very soul to oppose you. I may—nay, I must—be grateful for the service his money gift——"

"Say gifts, Alison."

"Well, gifts have done for you; but I can do no more, my dislike of him is so intense and rooted."

"Dislike! The proverb has it that a woman's dislike is only love turned inside out; and he loves you so! Think of his coronet."

"A new one—the gilt not even worn by time—a *parvenu* coronet."

"Well," said her father, impatiently, "it will be old in time; and does not the land teem with *parvenu* baronets? They are thick as blackberries now!"

And Alison was thankful when he dropped asleep, and she was left to her own aching thoughts, and released from the hateful subject for a time.

When a man of Cadbury's age and proclivities conceives a fancy for a girl, he is usually terribly in earnest about it ; but "of that delicious agony—that glorious fear which makes pallid the face of the lover—the void in life which must be filled up by a beloved woman—what did he know?"

Nothing—or what had he ever known, old *vaurien* as he was?

In short, he came now, not to watch or hope for recovery, but to learn how *ill* Sir Ranald was becoming—the sooner the latter was gone the better for his schemes. The baronet had altered greatly for the worse in his mysterious and complicated ailment, and the doctors who came—and, thanks to the birthday gift of Alison, she had secured the best medical attendance—shook their heads gravely when they saw him ; but not in her presence, as, with professional humanity, they wished to spare the poor girl any unnecessary pain.

Cadbury often reflected with genuine anger on how his plans for separating Alison from her father on the Continent, that he might both compromise and have her at his mercy, had failed ; and that he had barely won, by any pretence, even her gratitude. He had spent "a devil of a lot of money—even thousands one way or other," and was no nearer his end than before—fair means or foul.

He had, moreover, been dreadfully insulted at the Hôtel St. Antoine, "by that cad Goring," and even put in terror of his precious life ! And were all these to go for nothing?

Never, perhaps, since Time was born did a coward forgive the man who unmasked, affronted him, or did him dishonour in every way ; thus more than ever was Cadbury rancorous at Bevil Goring, and resolved to revenge himself, through the means of Alison Cheyne, if he could.

"As for Goring," said he, on one occasion to Sir Ranald, "we know nothing of him save that he bears a commission, which any fellow who can pass the necessary exams. can get now ; but as to who he is, or where he comes from, I don't suppose he could very clearly tell himself."

Sir Ranald, though somewhat rancorous in regard to his friend's rival, was patrician enough to think such remarks unnecessary, and only answered by a kind of sniff. He knew, on one hand, that Goring used the arms of the Sussex Gorings, a chevron between two annulets, dating from the first Edward, while Lord Cadbury was what the Scots called a "gutter

blood," whose father, the alderman, had, as recorded by Debrett, been the first esquire of his race "by Act of Parliament."

As for Alison, while undemonstrative, she was passionate as Juliet, soft and tender as Cordelia, yet none of the bloom had been taken off her young heart by that playing at love which is known as flirtation, "ere lifetime and love-time were one." Alison, perhaps, never knew what it was, and thus the full harvest of her heart and soul had gone forth to Bevil Goring, and she felt that if *he* failed her life would "have no more to bring but mockeries of the past."

She knew—with terror and foreboding of woe—that the great and coming crisis in that life would be her father's death. She had learned now to look that matter in the face, and pondered thereon.

Then the winning ways and sweetly placid features of Sister Lisette Gabion—features that Fra Angelica might have painted with joy—would come back vividly to memory; and with them she recalled the peaceful calm of existence in the Béguinage of Antwerp, where no sound came from the world without but the bells that called to prayer and the sweet carillons of the great cathedral tower; and many times there were when she wondered, if Bevil failed her, could she find a shelter there?

For already somehow he seemed to have passed out of her life, though daily she kissed the engagement ring he had placed upon her mystic finger.

"Papa dead, I shall have no present and no future," wailed the girl in her heart, "and what will become of me?"

What if she had to go down into the ranks of that great army which toils for daily bread? And with whom and in what fashion would she earn it? Thoughts like these were corrodingly bitter for a girl so young and beautiful, so delicate and tenderly nurtured as Alison Cheyne of Essilmont!

CHAPTER LIII.

AT CAPE COAST.

"WHAT is he—who is he?" asked the voice of one in authority, of one evidently used to command, and who was on horseback.

"An officer of the Rifle Brigade, sir," replied another.

"Dead, of course?"

"No, sir; but half dead of famine apparently. He looks pale enough, and his haversack is empty."

"How comes he to be here, and alone? Poor fellow, he must have fallen out on Sir Garnet's line of march, and been left in the rear."

Such were the welcome utterances in English which Jerry Wilmot heard with joy and astonishment, as, weakly and voiceless, he struggled up on his hands and arms and looked around him again, to find a mounted officer stooping from his saddle, regarding him with interest and curiosity, while twenty armed natives of a savage and foreign race jabbered and gesticulated violently as they lifted him from the ground, and the other European who had spoken applied a flask of brandy to his lips—a requisite stimulant, of which Jerry partook gratefully, while joy gushed up in his heart to find that he was, so far as he could see, saved.

And now to account for this mystery.

It is well known that four days after the destruction of Coomassie, that city of wigwams in a woody wilderness, a single British officer, attended by only twenty African soldiers, rode through the still smouldering ruins and found no inhabitants remaining.

This officer was Captain Reginald Sartorius, of the 6th Bengal Cavalry, who had been sent by Captain Glover, R.N., to report to Sir Garnet Wolseley that he was advancing, and was now within eighteen miles of the city with his subordinate column, the operations of which lie somewhat apart from our story, though we may briefly state that "the original scheme, and the elaborate attempt of a campaign starting from the Volta river, with from ten thousand to fifteen thousand warriors of several nations, had not indeed been carried out. The native kings had willingly accepted British money, and flint-lock muskets for their men; but their idea of invading Ashanti was to go away in another direction, and make war on people out of the Gold Coast Protectorate, and beyond the range of its policy. Neither at Addah nor at Accra could we get a real hold of the allies, upon whom Captain Glover had reckoned. He had, therefore, been instructed by Sir Garnet to conduct his own reliable force of Houssas and Yorabas by a given route across the Prah to join our main body at Coomassie."

In obedience to orders, and to report the approach of this

force, at midday on the 10th of February Captain Sartorius, starting from a point which he believed to be only seven miles distant from that place, began one of the most daring rides recorded in the annals of war, and for which he won deservedly the Victoria Cross.

Certain of meeting Sir Garnet at Coomassie, he departed without provisions, and, after a rough ride of eleven miles through a wild and terrible country, he found himself when night fell at a village seven miles distant from it. There strange and startling rumours prevailed among the women, for the men had all gone elsewhere. Coomassie, they told him, was no more, and its destroyers had departed.

Captain Sartorius sent messengers to Captain Glover, stating that Sir Garnet would only be a day's march off, and could easily be overtaken; but these messengers were fired on in the bush, and no tidings reached the naval officer.

Moving on with caution, next day Sartorius approached Coomassie, which was still shrouded in clouds of dark smoke, amid which the red flames were smouldering, and was met by a woman, who informed him that "the king and all his young warriors were in the town raging over its destruction, and vowing vengeance for it." Three houses alone had escaped the conflagration.

Aware that scant mercy would be shown to him and his twenty brave followers if taken, he quickly left that place of horrors behind him. Believing that he was now equidistant between Captain Glover and Sir Garnet, he bravely resolved to follow up the latter, a fortunate circumstance for the luckless Jerry Wilmot, who was found in the very track his party was pursuing.

"Come, my good friend," said he, after he had heard Jerry's story in a few words, "you must pull yourself together and make an effort, as we must push on without a moment's delay."

An effort—yes, thought Jerry gleefully, though he was weak, faint, and feverish, for his adventures in the moist and pestiferous bush were telling on him now. But for the advent of Captain Sartorius, what must his fate inevitably have been? He was mounted on the horse of a messenger who had been shot in the bush, and now rode on with his rescuers. The sheet of water which had barred his way so long they forded, the water rising to their saddle-girths, and then they pushed on,

hoping to reach the bridge constructed by our Engineers across the Ordah. It had been swept away! But the waters which destroyed it had subsided, and where that waste of water, so troublesome to our troops once rolled, the ground was dry and even hard, but the odours that loaded the air from the bodies of the slain Ashantees lying in the bush, left Captain Sartorius and his companions in no doubt of their being on the line of march followed by Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Poor Jerry had felt himself like one in an evil dream when he found his limbs so powerless that he was incapable of resisting and sinking on the earth. Now he felt also in a dream, and could scarcely realise that he was mounted, with friends, and on the homeward way, for he was half-dead with weakness, and, if not rescued when he was, he must have succumbed very soon after. Keenly had he realised the fact that

Past and to come seem best, things present *worst*.

Someone proffered him a cigar—a luxury, to a smoker a necessity—which he had been without for days, and he took it thankfully, gratefully, and never did he forget the pleasure that cigar afforded him; but the toil of the journey, after all the blood he had lost and all the mental and bodily suffering he had undergone, told sorely upon the nerves and system of Jerry, though a hardy and active young Englishman, who had never figured second in the hunting or cricket field, had been stroke oar of the Oxford boat, and up to everything in the way of sport that was manly and stirring. But he dug his knees into his saddle, and even when his head, through very weakness, was almost bowed on his horse's mane, he thought of Bella Chevenix, and bravely, as he phrased it, “strove to keep up his pecker.”

So onward the party progressed amid scenery clothed with strange trees, strange flowers, and gigantic plants, with long spiky, blade-like leaves, such as we only see in a botanical garden at home.

There was a lurid sunset, and the hills were as those of heaven, as described by Dante, “like sun-illuminated gold,” when the party of Sartorius drew near Amoafu, scaring away all Ashantees who approached him, and then when night fell he came upon a wounded Houssa, who had fought against us, but gave him the pleasing intelligence that the British troops

were at no great distance—at Fomannah—where Sir Garnet halted four days, and messengers came from the King of Ashanti with 1000 ounces of gold, and the latter received a treaty of peace in return.

The lonely march was resumed in the morning, and at Fomannah Jerry Wilmot and Sartorius, with his twenty men, after having marched, each with arms and forty rounds of ammunition, for fifty-five miles, overtook the retiring troops of Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Jerry now had “that ugly knock on his scone,” as he called it, properly dressed and attended to by the medical staff, in whose hands he found poor Dalton done nigh unto death by wounds, and borne among the sick in a hammock, and ere long Jerry was the occupant of another, prostrated by fever, and unconscious of most that followed.

Oblivious of the struggle of the night march to the village of Akanquassie, through a moonless, starless, and pitchy blackness never equalled ; through a swamp, over a precipitous hill, and anon through a forest, where every moment one ran against a tree, had the helmet knocked off by a bough, the face scratched by twigs and spiky shrubs, or the foot stumbled over a great gnarled root ; yet the voices of the officers and men rang cheerily out as they encouraged each other.

“Close up—close up. Now then, my lads !”

“This way—this way. Look out !”

“For what ?”

“A deep pool of water.”

“Mind that root ! mind that branch !”

“Hurrah, lads ! Forward !”

And as the dawn stole in the men of the 1st West India Regiment, who escorted the party of sick in hammocks, seemed to Jerry's eyes most ghastly in their light gray clothing and white helmets ; and it was said that “the negro so dressed looked like a convict who had been hung until black in the face and cut down.”

And often as he tossed in his hammock, which was slung on a pole dhooley-wise, he would mutter : “Oh, if Dalton had only let that — beetle alone !”

Cape Coast Castle was reached by the entire force in pretty good condition ; but, as an idea of the extent to which fever had raged among them, we may mention that of the Naval Brigade, included Marines, landed two hundred and seventy-

eight strong, there came back only one hundred and nineteen men.

All the rest had found their last homes in the awful solitude of the untrodden bush.

Apart from sorrow least he should never more see Laura and his little daughter so lately found and known, Dalton had a great horror of finding such a tomb, and being left so far away ; and the funeral of a brother officer, Captain H——, who had died at Essiman of fever, haunted him like a dream.

He remembered how the forest re-echoed to the three death volleys over the lonely grave, which lay in a beautiful spot, certainly as far as tropical flowers and foliage went, and had as a headstone a stately cotton-tree ; but ages may elapse ere the foot of a white man treads near it again.

All the fire of the soldier seemed to have gone out of Tony Dalton ; and for a time only the ailing and pitiful invalid remained ; and he longed intensely for the presence and the ministering tenderness of the brilliant Laura—more perhaps to feel in his the little white hand of Netty—the *enfant terrible* of the past time at Chilcote Grange.

Genuine hope first expanded the hearts of Dalton and Jerry, and in the hearts of many more, when they heard the pipes of the Black Watch strike up :

Oh, why left I my hame?
Why did I cross the deep?

announcing that the white walls of Cape Coast Castle were in sight, rising apparently sheer out of the jungle, and that beyond them lay our stately ships of war, and the free rolling waves of the blue highway that led to home and “Old England.”

“Rescued, safe, spared to see the white cliffs again—home and Bella !” murmured Jerry.

Of his mother, though a warm-hearted fellow, he scarcely thought, or if so, it was in this fashion : “By nature icy, with all her beauty and pride of place, she is my mother, true ; but what has she done for me ? As a child, she never caressed me, as other fellows’ mothers did—no, by Jove, nor tucked me in my little bed, nor gave me toys or sweets. Did I ever see her read her Bible in church, or teach me to say a prayer at her knee ? She only cared to see me prettily dressed, that I might outshine other women’s children, but left me otherwise to hang

as I grew ; and, by Jove, it is a wonder I didn't grow up a worse fellow than I have done !”

With half a world of waters between them, these were hard thoughts for a son to have of his mother ; but Lady Wilmot had inspired them herself.

Both Dalton and Jerry were in such a bad plight from their wounds, and the latter especially from exposure in the bush, that the doctors doubted much if they would “pull through” after the embarkation, as they were ever and anon tossing on the troubled tide of a jungle-fever that threatened to bear them both away to the shores of “the Promised Land,” with a grave in the tropical sea.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE OLD WARNING.

FONDLY had Alison Cheyne looked forward to her return to Chilcote, as a chance of reunion with Bevil Goring, as the means to a probable end of taking up the link of their love where it had last been dropped ; and now she had to content herself with the scanty intelligence gathered by Archie among the soldiers of his regiment, that he was not in the camp—was in London, but none knew in what part thereof.

In London, thought Alison, and making apparently no effort to write, or to discover her ; but she forgot that he must be utterly ignorant of her movements ; whether she was at home or abroad ; and that she could now receive letters freely and unquestioned, as her father was all but bed-ridden again.

Her bubble seemed to be bursting ; and this state of affairs—nothing—was the end of it, after all !

Thus they were both in painful ignorance of each other's movements amid all the ready appliances of post and telegraph, while Laura Dalton, who would have been a certain means of communication between them, was gone from Chilcote Grange, Alison knew not where, but, as it eventually proved, to Portsmouth to await the returning expedition from the Gold Coast.

So Alison's days were passed in nursing and monotony now, and often she and Mrs. Rebecca Prune had their heads together over a cookery-book, studying the decoction or preparation of

something "for papa"—to tempt his appetite ; for often *he* had one dish and Alison another of a more homely kind, or next to none, and though he might have a dainty spring chicken she dared not kill her hens, they were laying so well just then.

Sir Ranald had become, as Lord Cadbury had remarked rather unfeeling to Alison, "deuced stupid and snoozy now."

On an evening early in March he sat—as Alison long remembered—for the *last* time in his old arm-chair listening to the rooks cawing in the lofty beeches, the sparrows twittering under the eaves, and the setting sun was throwing a golden glory over the eastern uplands and a ruddy gleam on the square, ivied tower of Chilcote Church in the distance ; and then, without moving his head, which lay back on a pillow, his eyes, clear and keen though sunken, through the *pince-nez* balanced on his long thin nose, regarded lovingly and affectionately the downcast face of Alison, whose pretty hands were adjusting in a vase some fragrant March violets that Archie had brought her—violets which, as Shakespeare says, are "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes."

Once upon a time Sir Ranald had found it a burden—a bore to sign a cheque, to read a letter, or see his lawyer when he had a land steward ; now there were no cheques to sign, no letters to read save those of duns, and no lawyer to see, or land steward either ; and now, for the last time he began to harp upon the old string, when she kissed him, and asked him of what he was thinking.

"Of what can I think save your future, Alison ? Who cares what becomes of *mine*—little as there is left of it, and tired as I am of a life that is too intolerable to be endured for one's self alone !" was the querulous response.

Alison with difficulty restrained her tears, and in a mechanical way re-adjusted the bouquet of violets.

"Girls—especially poor ones—have only a certain number of chances, Alison, however handsome and attractive they may be," he resumed. "You, under great monetary disadvantages, have had one that is in every way unexceptionable. What more do you want—what more can you want ?" he added, rocking his bald head from side to side, and closing his eyes wearily.

Alison thought she had had *two* chances, and the most prized of them was now a richer offer than she ever deemed it could be ; but this was the one her father chose to ignore as no chance at all.

"I have read, papa," said she, "that those 'who have neither character nor conscience may drift, or let others shape the course for them; but the great thing is to be true to yourself.'"

"Yourself—and some penniless cur, like that at Aldershot! Go—I am disgusted!" exclaimed Sir Ranald, with a sudden gush of querulous anger.

Alison remained silent. She knew not that the fatal end was drawing so near now, otherwise she must have temporised with him more; and she thought: "But for my love for Bevil, to please papa I might have yielded—so many girls are drawn or thrust into hateful or grotesque marriages by want of money, friends, or a home."

But when she thought this, Alison was ignorant of what so many knew, and her father should have known—the private character of Lord Cadbury, or rather his want of it, as he was simply an old *vaurien*.

"Novels have turned your head, Alison," said Sir Ranald, in a low voice. "You expect to be over head and ears—of a necessity—in love with a hero; well," he added, through his set teeth, "this fellow Goring is not one—didn't he shirk the Ashanti affair?"

"Oh, papa, how cruel and unjust of you! He won three medals, and was twice wounded in India."

"Ah! you know all that?"

"He was 'detailed' for the *dépôt*, as it is called—so Archie told me—and had to remain at home."

"Ah! you know all about that too!" exclaimed her father, weakly, but in a sneering tone.

Why did not Bevil attempt to seek her out? she thought. Had a change come over his mind and plans? and was she left in loneliness to dream over the unattainable?

"It is not medals I would have you to set store upon, but money."

"I care little about it, papa, and shiver at the name of it."

"Perhaps so; but we ought to care for what money gets us."

"Should I accept Lord Cadbury with your permission if he were a poor man?"

"Certainly not," he replied snappishly; "even a poor lord would be no mate for Miss Cheyne of Essilmont—for my daughter!"

"But if she is poor too?"

"Then the greater madness to think of it. But I am weary of this subject."

"So indeed am I, papa."

"And I am weary of life too—oh, so weary—but for you, bird Ailie! Ring for Archie—and—let me to bed—to bed."

So he went to his bed that night, and never rose from it, for he was dying—dying partly of a general decay of the whole vital system; for he was a man who had lived high, and with whom life, if easy in one way, had been a species of feverish chase in another.

In anxious monotony passed the nights and days. Dr. Kneebone, the Esculapius of Chilcote village, could do nothing for him now; indeed there seemed nothing to be done but to watch for the end; and as Alison watched, with a heart torn by anxiety, passionate filial regard, and terror of what must inevitably come, again her sweet face, the softness and delicacy of which the pencil of a Greuze alone could have portrayed, became sad and pale and livid.

Her eyes grew heavy and inflamed by much sleeplessness, and all over her bearing there spread a soft air of patient suffering, with equal evidence of great resolution and fortitude; and yet—yet, withal, with a shudder in her heart, times there were when she began to think of sacrificing herself, if doing so could save her father and prolong his days.

And old Archie Auchindoir moaned to himself as he pottered about his daily work, and often he muttered anxiously: "It's no for nocht the gleds whustle at nicht!"

Dying—Dr. Kneebone assured Lord Cadbury that the old man was certainly dying; and fully stronger than ever grew the hopes of the peer to possess Alison, the poor and forlorn, beautiful and hunted creature, in the midst of her coming desolation and loneliness. Genuine pity or commiseration he had none.

"Save the puir lassie, he is the last o' the Cheynes o' Essilmont, my lord," said Archie, in a very broken voice, as he ushered the peer out one day; "the last leaf o' a lang, lang ancestral tree."

"What the devil is the use of a family tree unless one could sell it for timber," replied the peer, as he took the horse's reins from Gaskins; "and as for ancestors" (this was rather a sore subject with him), "if one could raise the wind on them, there is many a fellow who wouldn't even leave himself a father just now!"

And so his lordship cantered off, sitting in his saddle, as Archie said "for a' the world like a pock o' peats."

Alison was watching her father sleeping, while this would-be lover rode pleasantly home to his luxurious dinner, and, as she watched him, she thought how fearfully wan and gray his face looked ; and yet how noble it was in its manly beauty. What a handsome youth he must have been when he won her mother's heart as a girl.

"How dark it has become !" she murmured in a low voice, as Archie brought noiselessly in a carefully shaded lamp, "and the sunset was so unnaturally bright," she added, in a kind of whisper, with a convulsive trembling of her lips and a strange pitifulness and foreboding in heart as she resumed her seat by the bedside, in shadow.

Dr. Kneebone had looked at the sinking patient for the last time, and departed with a very grave face—grave, for his kindly heart was full of pity for the young girl, who now knew that the great change would come before long.

The vicar of Chilcote had read the prayers for the dying, and not without deep emotion, for he was a warm-hearted old man ; and after placing the book in Alison's hand, with certain pages marked for her perusal, had departed also ; and she—declining all offers of feminine assistance from the vicarage—remained alone, and choked with emotion by the bedside, with one of her father's passive hands clasped in hers, to wait and to watch.

A storm was rising without, but great was the hush of silence in the half darkened chamber as the hours of the night stole solemnly on ; and Archie and Mrs. Rebecca Prune, approaching the door on tiptoe, peeped in from time to time, but were always warned away by a wave of Alison's hand.

On the mantelpiece ticked a handsome little carriage clock, one of the few remaining relics of former wealth and luxury ; but the sound it made was soon lost amid the din of the elemental war without.

Once or twice Alison mechanically turned her pale and hopeless face to the window ; the bare black branches of the great beeches were tossing on the gale, and dark clouds were hurrying past the white, weird disc of the moon ; eerily waile the blast around the old house, rustling the rain-soaked creepers on its walls, and the great drops swept in gusts upon the rattling window panes.

The patient stirred restlessly ; the din of the rising storm—oh, could she but muffle it, shut it out—disturbed him.

Higher it rose, and with each successive gust of the increasing wind the ivy and creepers rattled on the window-panes, whilst the great beeches seemed to shiver in anticipation of a fiercer blast,

For many a year to come would a storm be associated with sorrow, gloom, and death in the mind of Alison Cheyne !

The thunder growled, and more than once a gleam of lightning overspread the northern quarter of the sky, showing the tall trees in black outline tossing their branches wildly.

The sound thoroughly roused Sir Ranald, and recalled his dying energies.

“Kiss me, bird Ailie—kiss me,” said he, in a voice like a husky whisper ; “the light has surely gone out, I cannot see you, child.”

Alas, it was the light of life that had left his eyes for ever !

Alison saw how fixed they were in expression as she kissed him softly, most tenderly, again and again, and wiped his forehead with her handkerchief. Then, with hands that were tremulous but firm in intent, he drew down the lids of his eyes—as James VI. of Scotland did, with wonderful presence of mind, when dying, and no other man on record—and they never opened again !

Alison thought he was asleep, and listened to his stertorous breathing, while restraining her own ; it grew fainter and fainter, but there was a sound in it that is indescribable, though more significant than any other, that a human soul is on the wing ; while his shrivelled hand groped feebly and fatuously about the coverlet as if seeking for another ; and, taking it between her own, Alison bent her lips over it.

It trembled in her grasp, and when she looked up he had passed away, and an awful placidity lay upon the livid face. At that moment the thunder was grumbling, and the wind bellowing ; so it might be fancy, or it might not, but amid the tumult of sound Alison seemed to hear—what was it?—the wild baying of a hound dying hollowly away in the distance.

“Oh, my God,” she exclaimed, and fell prone, face downward, with arms outspread, upon the floor.

The hound—the hound again ! Was it fevered fancy ? Could she but think she was warring with shadows—but alas, she could not, then at least !

CHAPTER LV.

"ASHES TO ASHES."

WHEN she opened her eyes with a sob and a gasp, she found herself in the arms of Archie and Rebecca Prune, and while her little white hand wandered in bewilderment across her brow, she moved her head from side to side, and looked vacantly, wearily, and inquiringly around her.

At last she realised it all, and rushed to the bedside.

"He has left ye, my bairn," said Archie, in a broken voice, "but God bides wi' ye yet."

"Oh, papa, come back to me—I cannot live without you, papa. Do not leave me thus, all alone, all alone!" she wailed out, as she buried her face in the bedclothes, and threw her arms across the stiffening form, till the old man, by the exertion of strength that was great for his years, bore her bodily away to her own room, and left her there with Mrs. Prune.

Fast as the storm-drops without, the tears rolled over her pale cheeks, while she sobbed as though her heart would break; nor did the kind old woman who hung over her, and caressed her poor aching head by pressing it against her maternal breast, attempt to check Alison's passionate weeping, which proved alike a safety-valve to her brain and heart, till, worn out with all she had undergone for days and nights past, a heavy sleep came upon her.

Old Archie hung over her for a minute ere he left her, and thought what a lovely face hers was to look upon, pale and exhausted though it was in expression. The forehead low and broad, the eyebrows dark, yet delicately marked; the waxen-like eyelid fringed by long lashes that lay lightly on the cheek; the rosebud mouth so full of sweetness and decision.

We must hasten over this gloomy portion of our story, and get, with Alison, into the busy world once more, for her father's death led to many changes.

In connection with that event, the real or fancied sound she had heard preyed deeply on her mind, and the only person to whom she could speak, brokenly and with quivering lips, on the subject—Archie Auchindoir—believed in the existence of the supernatural so thoroughly that he left nothing unsaid to confirm her in the belief.

All people are now incredulous of everything, and to none other but Bevil Goring would she have spoken on the subject—and yet with her it had much of the superstition of the heart in it. Men of science assert that there is no evidence that the ordinary course of nature is ever interrupted. According to their theories, "there never have been, there are not now, and there never will be, either miracles or opposition. Between the orthodox, who doubt modern supernaturalism, and the men of science, who are sceptics all round, the strange thing is that anyone should arise to express a belief which is so contrary to the spirit of our time, though we have by analysis and investigation laid our hands on many things hitherto sealed"—to wit, gas, electricity, the telephone, and so forth.

Be all this as it may, we tell the tale as it was told to us, and hope the hound of Essilmont, if it bayed at all, did so for the last time.

At Chilcote the first day of death stole quietly on. Prostrate with grief, Alison remained in her own room, leaving all that was to be done with the vicar, the doctor, and Archie, who, plunged in sorrow great as any could feel who shared not the blood of the dead man, hovered about her in a helpless kind of way, as if he would have striven to console—yea, almost to caress her. Was she not the child he had carried often in his arms? but, as he phrased it, "he wistna what to do."

And as the girl sat in her room, careless of who came to the house or left it, with the one awful conviction upon her that *he* had passed away "to that unutterable mystery and greeting which mortal eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," her beautiful face grew all lined and haggard, and her dark-rimmed eyes, in their peculiar glitter, told of many a sleepless night and of much mental anguish.

Lord Cadbury, as we have elsewhere said, hated sick-rooms, "and all that sort of thing;" still more did he hate death-beds, funerals, and all connected therewith. And when last at Chilcote, seeing that the end was not far off—indeed, the doctors had said so—he went back to town to await the final catastrophe, "the double event," that would rid him of a querulous friend, and place that friend's daughter more completely at his mercy—yea, and the mercy of Fate.

In reply to the posted announcements of the death, his card

came to Alison in a black-edged envelope, sealed with his coronet in black wax. He did not attempt—even with all his pretences and past protestations—to indite a sham letter of condolence, nor did she miss it.

“Dead—dead at last!” muttered Cadbury, as he sat in the sunny bow-window of the club looking out on busy Pall Mall, his ferret-like eyes glittering cunningly and leeringly, as he tugged his white, horseshoe-shaped moustaches. “Well, he’s a loss to no one but the girl herself—not even to his creditors now—the vain old Scotch pump, with his pedigree and his ancestry, his heraldry and his beggarly bosh! But I would like to know *who* the devil sent that mysterious thousand pounds! It may be a trump-card for me yet.”

Cadbury began to consider his plans anew. He would get Alison up to London and give her a letter of introduction—as companion or something of that kind—to a now somewhat *passée* “lady friend” of his, who occupied a tiny villa at St. John’s Wood, and drove a brougham, of course, who would “soon contrive to make it all straight for him;” and he chuckled as he thought of the success that, through her, would eventually be his. Anyway, the proud Alison would find some difficulty in “cresting up” her haughty little head after her residence at St. John’s Wood.

Lord Cadbury could not come to the quiet and hasty funeral at Chilcote; he was “too indisposed.” Certainly Alison did not want him. She had had quite enough of the peer, and hoped never to see his face again.

“Better awa’, Miss Alison, better awa’; his absence is guid companie,” said Archie, who could not endure Cadbury and loathed his dandified groom Gaskins. “’Od, missie, he’s worth nae weal that canna bide wae. May he dee like a trooper’s horse, wi’ his shoon on!” added Archie through his set teeth.

So as a hateful dream the details of death passed on. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” The vicar’s voice fell clearly in the calm spring air on the ear of Alison as she leant on the doctor’s arm, for very few were present at the funeral, and these few, save Archie, were strangers; but her soul seemed to shrink within her as she heard the shovelfuls of gravel pattering down on the polished coffin-lid and the large metal plate, which bore the name and age of

“SIR RANALD CHEYNE, BART., OF THAT ILK
AND ESSILMONT.”

The last of her race, save *herself*!

"Surely, surely, if he is in England, Bevil will come to me now when he hears of this calamity!" she whispered in her heart, as she sat in the solitude of her own room when all was over.

But Bevil Goring came not. He had never had explained to him the *cause* of her abrupt and mysterious flight or departure from Chilcote, and the subsequent trip in Cadbury's yacht, and why, or how, she had neither time nor opportunity to write to him the briefest note of farewell or enlightenment on the subject; but all that had nothing to do with his absence on the present occasion, as we shall relate anon.

But she was brooding sadly over it, while—declining the proffered hospitality of the vicarage—she sat in her loneliness, watching the stars as they came out one by one, thinking of the bitterness and brevity of human life, and marvelling how many millions of the human race these orbs had looked down upon, and would yet look down upon, in the ages to come.

Her father's spendthrift errors in youth, and his petulance and selfishness in old age, were all forgotten by Alison now. She remembered only his love for herself, and even repented that she could not gratify him by sacrificing herself to Cadbury.

Would she have prolonged his life by doing so? That was a problem on which she could not—dared not dwell.

His tenants—or rather those who had been his tenants—far away among the braes of Aberdeenshire, longer than they might have been, but for the merciful consideration of his creditors—men who, even in this advanced age, deemed themselves born vassals of the house of Cheyne, as their fathers did when the Red Harlaw was fought, or the Brig o' Dee was bravely manned in the days of Montrose—were stirred with much genuine grief when they heard of his death. For, though proud to his equals, he had ever been a friendly and kindly landlord to them, and thinking of them ever, in the good spirit of the olden time, as "my father's people," he would shake warmly the hand of old Donald Gordon, the gudeman of a little farm-town, while asking after his wife and daughters by name; though he would barely nod his aristocratic head to some "earth-hungry" commercial man, who had acquired a fine estate—all won by honest industry.

"Oh, why does not Bevil come to me; if in England, he must have heard of papa's death?" was her ever recurring thought.

And he did hear it ; but, by a strange contingency, a little too late. Meanwhile, not much time was given Alison to linger in desolate Chilcote, and she found that, a day or two after the funeral, she would have to face the cold and bitter world—yea, and to face it alone, tender, young, and inexperienced as she was !

Sir Ranald's death brought the last of his creditors swooping down upon the dregs and lees of his possessions, and, with a heart that seemed broken afresh, Alison surrendered to them everything, even to that heirloom which her father deemed the palladium of the Cheynes—the great silver tankard that had been the gift of Elizabeth, Queen Dowager of Scotland, to Sir Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont and Inverugie, the master of her household. And she wept with the knowledge that to have parted with that would well-nigh have broken her father's heart.

The mysterious thousand pounds were spent—all save a little sum ; but the last of her father's smaller debts had been paid, and his last days soothed by many a comfort. So Alison preferred to leave Chilcote—for ever, and Archie pressed her sorely to accept, in whole or in part, his carefully treasured “three hunner pounds,” but pressed her in vain.

Memories of the Béguinage and of sweet Sister Lisette came over her now ; but no—no—even if they would take her there for what her hands might do, it would seem like a relinquishment of Bevil Goring and life too.

“I am sure, Archie, I could teach little children—give lessons in music or something in London,” said she.

“And I'll gang to London too, missie.”

“For what purpose ?”

“Odd's sake, missie, to tak' care o' ye.”

“Poor, dear Archie !” said the girl softly, with a sob in her slender white throat.

Accompanied by this retainer, she paid a farewell visit to the churchyard of Chilcote Vicarage, where, amid the bright sunshine of spring, the earth seemed at its fairest, and the quaint, old, picturesque fane of the Norman days, moss-green, ivy-grown, and tree-shaded, was casting its shadows across “God's Acre.”

She laid a chaplet of flowers, woven by her own loving hands and watered by her tears, on her father's grave—that spot which to her no sunshine could brighten—the spot where he lay, without a stone as yet, the last of an old, old warlike and historic

race; and then she prayed for the dead—a prayer, it is said, never offered up in vain; for though the petition may be refused, still the petitioner may be rewarded in some fashion for the generous and unselfish prompting, and we are told it is good to pray for them, that they may be loosed from their sins. So Alison prayed by her father's grave, while her faithful follower, who stood thereby hat in hand, had his mind full of prayerful thoughts that could take no form of utterance, for Archie was a true-blue Presbyterian, and knew not how to pray for those who could no longer do so for themselves; and then the pair crossed the churchyard stile in silence and passed away.

Old, wrinkled, sour-visaged Archie Auchindoir, with keen gray eyes, white hair, and saturnine cast of features, was a strange "Squire o' the Dames," or *Escudero* (as the Spaniards would have it), for a handsome young girl, albeit that she was in the deepest mourning; but no one could be more kind, loving, and reverential, for poor Archie loved the very ground his young mistress trod, and watched over her as a father would have done.

And so, with this peculiar attendant, Alison bade adieu to old Rebecca Prune, quitted Chilcote, and, furnished with a letter of introduction from the vicar, set out by second class for London by an early train on her melancholy pilgrimage; and many a poor girl has thus set forth to earn her bread without the honest consolation and support of a vassal so tender and true.

Piqued as she was now beginning to be by the knowledge that Bevil Goring was in London, when he might have been seeking her, especially amid her sorrow, in the country, she was not without hopes—but oh, how slender they were!—of perhaps hearing something of him in that vast human wilderness towards which she was being hurried.

CHAPTER LVI.

EVENTS PROGRESS.

THE whole expedition was now returning from the Gold Coast, save those who had found their graves in the wilderness on the advance to Coomassie, and in the fighting incident thereto.

Among those returning were the two hundred and sixty-eight wounded officers and men. The number of deaths in proportion was small as compared with those in recent European conflicts—a fact explainable by the arms and ammunition used by the Ashantees ; first, their old-fashioned firelocks and use—not of bullets, but slugs, projectiles which soon lost their velocity after discharge, and were easily stopped after penetrating the body, the stronger bones of which they were incapable of breaking ; and lastly, by the total absence of artillery.

The telegraphic wire made people at home aware that many of the Rifle Brigade had died on the voyage homeward between the Gold Coast and Madeira ; that the Welsh Fusiliers had only twenty men on their sick list ; and the hardy Highlanders very few, though they had to regret the death by wounds of their major, William Baird, who had served with them for twenty years, and been at the siege and fall of Sebastopol.

It was known in England that many of the sick and wounded were to remain in the hospital ships, *Victor Emmanuel* and *Simoon*, or were landed at Ascension and the Cape de Verde Isles for medical treatment ; but, as no officer of the Rifles was recorded as among these, Laura with her daughter, escorted by Goring, had betaken herself to the port which is the great headquarters of the British navy, to behold the arrival of the victorious troops from Ashanti, and for whom a great ovation was prepared.

People from London and elsewhere crowded in thousands to witness their landing. In the hotel where Laura and Bevil Goring were, there were more than one old Scottish veteran officer of the Crimea, and even of the Peninsular war, who had come from the land beyond the Tweed to see, as they said, “ their dear old Black Watch again ; ” and more than one lady in widow’s weeds, some young, some elderly, with their little brood, come to look again upon the ranks of the Welsh Fusiliers and the Rifles, though there a beloved face would be seen no more.

How gladly would poor Bella Chevenix have gone too ! But she had no valid excuse—no friend or chaperon going, save Laura, of whose movements she was ignorant ; so she had but to wait, in the secluded village, the tidings given by the newspapers, but with more impatience and certainly less unanimity than Lady Julia at splendid Wilmothurst.

Greater was her love for Jerry than the latter could actually realise ; for, with all her past coquetry, Bella was one of those ardent and impulsive girls that a man only comes across once in a lifetime, or, it may be, thinks so. She knew that Jerry was comparatively safe when the fleet sailed, but she had heard with dismay of deaths among the Rifles ere it reached Madeira ; so it may be imagined how eagerly and anxiously she watched the public prints, and learned that on the 19th of March the English people had the joy of welcoming home, first the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers, as they landed from the *Tamar* at Portsmouth, where, among many other graceful gifts, a regimental goat was presented to them in lieu of their famous Indian one, which had died on the coast of Africa ; and anon of the more brilliant ovation which was reserved for the heroic Black Watch when the soldiers of the latter came in the *Sarmatian*, and, prior to landing, had gleefully discarded their gray tunics and white helmets to resume their national uniform, the kilt and bonnet, so known to martial glory. And then came the Rifle Brigade and the Royal Engineers on board the mighty *Himalaya*.

How Laura's heart beat while she clung to Goring's arm and clasped little Netty's tiny hand, when the signals announced that the ship was about to enter that great harbour which is the most spacious and secure in the British Isles, though less than a quarter of a mile in breadth at the narrowest part of the entrance.

"There she is," exclaimed Goring, "just rounding South Sea Castle !"

Laura's bright hazel eyes grew dim as she watched the approaching ship. It seemed to her as if it was but yesterday, in one sense, since she had seen the transport depart with the Rifles after her reconciliation and reunion with Dalton ; and yet, so strong are the impressions of the human mind, that it also seemed as if it were ages ago ; and now—now he was coming home, though but perhaps the wreck of himself, to her and their little Netty—the husband and the father from whom they had been so long and unnaturally separated !

"By Jove, she has her ensign half hoisted !" exclaimed a voice among the thousands of whom she formed a unit.

Goring had remarked this through his double field-glass, yet said nothing of it to his fair companion, lest she might be unnecessarily alarmed.

"What does it mean?" she asked him more than once, ere he replied, unwillingly: "It means that there has been a death on board."

"A death!" she said faintly, as she recalled the loving tenor of Dalton's last farewell letter to her, written like Jerry's to Bella on the night before Coomassie was entered, and of the fatal telegram that told of his serious wounds. "A death, Goring?" she repeated, with a wild expression in her beautiful eyes, while her cheek grew snowy white as she watched the slowly approaching ship, which was under half steam now.

"Yes, marm," said an officious old sailor, who was regarding the stately vessel through an old, battered telescope tied round with spunyarn; "some poor fellow has lost the number of his mess, for there is a coffin covered by a Union Jack in one of the quarter boats, as you may see for yourself, marm."

He proffered his telescope civilly enough, but Laura shrank closer to the side of Goring, who remained silent, for he too had his own thoughts. She could not look; her eyes felt sightless, and her poor heart seemed to die within her with the most fearful forebodings.

The bands of several regiments stationed at Portsmouth were now filling the sunny air with music, and the cheers of the Riflemen, clustering like bees along the sides of the mighty ship, were responding to the united voices of thousands on the shore, giving those hearty and joyous shouts that come from British throats and British lungs alone; and Laura, under all the pressure of the occasion and her own terrible thoughts, was on the point of fainting, as the transport came slowly abreast of the sea-wall, when Goring threw an arm round her, and exclaimed: "Thank God, there is Dalton—there is dear old Tony at last!"

"Where—oh, where?" asked Laura, in a breathless voice.

"At the back of the poop," he replied, lifting Netty aloft on his shoulder, as they now saw an officer—Dalton, indeed—with a face white as a tropical helmet, with the pallor that comes of suffering and much loss of blood—waving his handkerchief to them in recognition, for the ship was very close in shore, and Laura was soon to learn that the melancholy freight in the quarter-boat was the body of a poor sergeant who died off The Lizard, and whose widow—believing herself yet a wife—was awaiting him on the pier with a babe at her breast—the babe his eyes would never look upon.

In a few minutes more the steam was blowing off, and Goring, with those in his care, joined the stream of the privileged few, who poured along the gangways on board.

"God is very merciful," murmured Laura, as she laid her face on Dalton's breast, heedless of spectators. "He has given you back to me——"

"From the very gates of death, dearest Laura."

"Oh, what should I have done if you had perished, my darling?—oh, my darling," she said in a low voice of exquisite tenderness as he embraced Netty—Antoinette, so named after himself, and grown up to girlhood without his knowledge of her existence.

"Bravo," cried a hearty voice familiar to them all; "as Albert Smith used to say : '*C'est l'amour, l'amour, l'amour, qui fait le monde go round, O.*' Thank God I see you and Old England again, Laura," and Jerry Wilmot kissed her with hearty goodwill.

Like Dalton, Jerry was very pale and wan; but not so feeble as the former—and from the effects of his wounds and fever could scarcely stand, even yet.

The ovation that followed the landing of the Rifles may be fresh in the recollection of many. Balls, banquets, and addresses were amply accorded to all the returned troops, and decorations and crosses for valour were fully bestowed; but of all the joyous entertainments Bevil Goring saw nothing, as a notice which he read by chance in a paper led him to leave Portsmouth on the evening of the very day the regiment landed.

It was simply a paragraph in a Southampton paper, on which his eye fell casually, that rooted him for a few minutes to the spot, and ran thus :

"We understand that the late Sir Ranald Cheyne, Bart., of Essilmont and that ilk, whose demise at Chilcote we recorded some days ago, has died without heirs male, and the baronetcy, one of the oldest in Scotland, has thus become extinct."

"Who died some days ago at Chilcote?" thought Goring, who felt a species of shock; "and Alison is thus alone—alone in the world—poor girl! At Cadbury's mercy perhaps—while I—oh, what must she think of me? Why do I only hear of this calamity now?"

So next noon betimes saw him arrive at Chilcote with his horse at a rasping gallop, and his heart beating high with mingled hope, love, and great commiseration, as he knew how

Alison idolised the querulous old man she had lost ; and again, as before, his spirit sank on finding only silence and desolation—the house abandoned and all its windows shuttered.

“Desolation, as before,” he muttered, as he leaped from his horse ; “desolation, and perhaps mystery too. Where can she have gone, and with whom?”

He passed the gate and mechanically handled the door-knocker, and the sound thereof sounded hollowly through the silent house. He drew close to the shuttered windows, and peeped in through a fissure in one. He saw the almost entirely darkened dining-room, from the walls of which the portraits of the two cavalier brothers were still looking grimly and stonily down ; on the table was a vase, with a few flowers still in it ; and near stood a chair and a work-basket, in which some coloured wools were lying.

Very recently must Alison have been there, as the flowers seemed still somewhat fresh ; in fact, she had only set out on her pilgrimage the day before, when he had been at Portsmouth.

How full the place seemed of her presence ! Yet he had to turn sadly away.

The buds in the giant beeches were bursting already into tender green leaves ; the birds were twittering and singing in the hedgerows, and the kine lowed amid the deep spring grass of yonder meadows ; “the deep bell” swung in the distant tower of Chilcote Church ; the dogs barked sharply in an adjacent farm-yard ; and close and nigh was the hum of the bee, as it thrust its golden head into the cups of the spring flowers in the now neglected garden.

To his senses all seemed unchanged as when he last saw Alison there ; and where was she now—his love—his promised wife ?

Where again was she gone ? Into the hard and chilly world—all the colder and more perilous now that her father was dead, and that she must stand alone in it ?

Alone !

Bevil Goring felt his heart wrung by irrepressible anxiety, and he bethought him at once of appealing to the vicar of the parish, who could not fail to possess some information on the subject.

The latter received him with considerable suavity, for he was a kind-hearted old gentleman, but eyed him keenly under

his bushy white eyebrows. He had heard—but how, he knew not, for gossip spreads fast in a secluded country parish; yet he *had* heard that there was a young officer from the camp, who was wont to hover near Chilcote Beeches, and who was eminently distasteful to the late Sir Ranald, for reasons best known to the latter; so the worthy vicar fashioned his answers accordingly.

Bevil, however, learned that Alison had been resident for many weeks at Chilcote after her return from the Continent, and prior to the demise of her father.

Many weeks! thought he, and yet she had never written, as she might have done, to his address at the camp, whence letters were forwarded to his address in London. Poor Alison had not written because she knew he was absent, and, moreover, she was sorely pre-occupied at home.

Was she under the influence of Cadbury? thought Bevil. Oh, that was impossible! Yet Goring began to feel, as Alison often felt, that their engagement—that its many trammels—was a very peculiar one, and would be so while her father lived. Now he was gone, and wealth had accrued to Goring, yet they were as much apart as ever!

“Sir Ranald was dead, yes,” he heard the vicar saying, “and buried near the ancient yew in the churchyard, where Miss Cheyne meant in time to erect a marble cross.”

“That shall be my duty,” observed Goring.

“Yours?” said the vicar, inquiringly, and again the bushy brows were knitted. “Poor man! he is sleeping where I know he did not want to lie, in my churchyard; yet he will sleep as soundly there in English earth, let us hope, as if he lay among his ancestors in Ellon Kirk, among mailed knights, mediæval bones, and the *Hic jacets* of other days,” he added, smiling.

“Where has Miss Cheyne gone to?”

“London,” replied the vicar, curtly.

“Can you give me her address?” asked Goring, eagerly.

“May I ask who inquires?” said the vicar.

“I sent in my card—Captain Goring, of the Rifle Brigade.”

“Just returned from Ashanti?”

“Nay,” replied Bevil, colouring with honest mortification, “I was detailed for home service.”

“And now stationed at Aldershot?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! a bad place Aldershot—a very centre of dissipation, I fear. May I ask if you are a relation?”

"I am not."

"A friend?" queried the vicar.

"Of course—one most deeply interested in Miss Cheyne."

"I thought so," rejoined the vicar, eyeing him keenly and with a curiously provoking smile while playing with his gold eyeglass; "may I ask how and why?"

"Certainly—I am engaged to her."

"Her *fiancé*?" asked the vicar; "is that what you mean?"

"Yes; and now *where* is she?"

"I regret—regret to say—that—that I have not her present address. She only left this for London yesterday."

"In other words, by your tone," said Goring, haughtily, as he rose and took his hat, "you know it, but decline to give it to me?"

"I do not say so," replied the vicar, also rising, as if the interview was ended; "but for the present you will excuse me saying more."

"Sir!" exclaimed Bevil, with some heat.

"Goring—Goring," muttered the vicar, eyeing Bevil's card; "it is strange that the young lady never spoke to me of you, though in her grief she several times mentioned another friend."

"Ah!—who?"

"Lord Cadbury."

"Cadbury!" exclaimed Goring, with a contemptuous inflexion of voice that did not escape the listener.

"Yes; who, by a very ample remittance—a thousand pounds, I believe—did much to ease and soothe her poor father's last days on earth."

"Indeed!"

Whew! here was intelligence. His birthday gift had been attributed to, and evidently adopted by, that reptile Cadbury! And, finding that there was nothing to be made of the suspicious and over-wary vicar, he withdrew.

Scarcely had Goring, disappointed and dispirited, taken his departure, when Lord Cadbury, accompanied by Gaskins, having found Chilcote deserted, arrived at the vicarage to make the same inquiries, but with very different intentions. Impressed by the years and rank of his second visitor, the vicar admitted that he was cognisant of Miss Cheyne's movements, and, on consideration, promised to send her correct address to

Cadbury Court when she wrote to him from London ; for knowing the helplessness of the young girl, even with Cadbury was the vicar wary.

Dalton remained at Chilcote Grange to be nursed by Laura ; Jerry departed on sick leave to Wilmothurst, while Bevil Goring remained with the battalion at Aldershot to undergo the drudgery of the spring drills in the Long Valley, and await in a kind of silent desperation with hope to hear something of Alison.

How terrible to endure was this period of an inaction that was enforced by circumstances over which he had no control, and many a hearty malediction he bestowed upon the close old vicar of Chilcote.

Often he opened the clasp of her ring—Ellon's ring—and gazed upon her tiny lock of hair, now faded and withered by the heat it had undergone when “up country” in the Land of the Sun, and on her pictured face he gazed till his eyes ached and burned with the intensity of his longing to see the features smile, the lips uncloze, in fancy.

We are told that if a man, “overborne by any grief or pain—not the more endurable because no outward sign can be discerned—should go forth into a crowd to seek for solace, the chances are that he will return in a more discontented frame of mind than that in which he set out, simply from realising the fact how infinitely little his own sufferings affect the most of the world at its work or play.”

Amid the bustle, gaiety, and business of the crowded camp at Aldershot, Bevil Goring realised all this to the fullest extent.

Day after day went by and brought no news of Alison, either to Goring or to Laura Dalton, whom he saw frequently, and hope deferred was making the heart of the young officer very “sick” indeed ; but, though he wrote a very important letter to his solicitors at Gray's Inn Square concerning certain properties at Chilcote, he went there no more.

In the words of L. E. L., he could no more

To the loved haunt return,
Love's happy home ; and touch the tender chord,
And softly whisper there the little word,
The name whereat fond memories shall burn,
That parting vows record.

CHAPTER LVII.

BELLA'S DOT.

LADY JULIA WILMOT had been in hope that, when the Ashanti "affair" was over, Jerry would settle down, "marry money," free his ancestral seat from encumbrance, and take a proper pride in it; but for a time after the capture of Coomassie it had seemed that she was to be afflicted by a double calamity—that the estate was lost, and Jerry might never return.

It was not in her aristocratic nature to be very much moved about anything. Excitement or enthusiasm of any kind was "bad form," she deemed. Thus, if she was not plunged in profound grief when she heard of the poor fellow's supposed death, neither was she greatly excited when she heard that he was safe and coming home again. To this noble daughter of twenty earls, an only son more or less in the world really seemed of no great consequence, unless it were if he "married money," to serve her own ends.

When tidings of Jerry's death came, she had attired herself most becomingly in fashionable mourning of the requisite depth of wear, as understood by the drapers in Regent Street. Round her white throat were narrow tuckers of yellowish-white lace, and a rustling train, spread over a crinolette, floated behind her. Now that he was safe, her mourning was relinquished, almost with a sigh, we fear, it *was* so becoming; and Floss's mother-of-pearl basket, which had been duly lined with black silk, was now refitted with blue satin.

She received Jerry in her usual stately fashion; gave him her cool, slim hand to press, which he did heartily, while his eyes moistened; and accorded her smooth and unlined cheek for his salute, and then his welcome ended. So ere long Jerry began to think, as Mrs. Gaskell's novel has it, that John Thornton's mamma might be wrong when she says, "Mothers' love is given by God, John. It holds fast for ever and for ever. A girl's love is like a puff of smoke, it changes with every wind." But then there was nothing aristocratic about stalwart John Thornton's mother.

Mr. Chevenix had always loved Jerry for his father's sake, and for the sake of the "Wilmots of Wilmothurst," who had

been of Wilmothurst, "and that ilk," as the Scots would say, for time out of mind; but there his regard ended; he had small care for Lady Julia, and, when tidings came of Jerry's death, after a moderate time had elapsed, he resolved to take the mortgages in hand and assert his rights—in short, to make the property, what it now almost virtually was, his own, and to request Lady Julia to leave the place, to crush her false and insensate pride in a heart that seemed without any other human sentiment.

"He has formally announced the foreclosure of the mortgages, this man Chevenix, Emily," said Lady Julia, with some consternation—at least for her—as she opened her letters one morning. "The crash has come at last!"

"What does that mean, aunt?" asked the young lady.

"My lawyer tells me it means the act of foreclosing—cutting off the equity of redemption, and that the money would not be taken in payment, even were poor Jerry alive and had it to pay."

And Mr. Chevenix had chuckled as he gave these instructions, for he had endured enough of Lady Julia's aristocratic caprice, and knew how she had often treated his Bella, a girl certainly second to none, "as if she were the dirt of the earth," as he said, bitterly.

But Bella had deplored these sharp measures, for she felt that a strange but tender and undefinable tie bound her to Jerry Wilmot, dead or alive.

As children she and Jerry had been permitted to be playmates, and she had been somewhat of a pet with his father, the old squire; but it was not until they had grown up, till he had been at college and then joined the Rifles, that Lady Julia felt that the intimacy was—well, unfortunate, and to be finally snubbed.

The shock given to the sensitive Bella by the perils encountered by Jerry—first the report of his death, and subsequently the account of the precarious condition in which he had embarked at Cape Coast, caused her many terrible nights and days, and nearly threw the poor girl into a fever, as she had none in whom to confide her sorrow, or her secret love; but sorrow rarely kills, and though at first fretful and resentful, with the memory of Lady Julia's want of proper affection, she was very gentle, quiet, and patient, and besought her father not to foreclose the mortgages yet awhile; but he, out of all patience

with non-payment of interest on one hand, Lady Julia's hauteur and insolence on the other, with the great doubt entertained of Jerry ever coming home to keep the fragment of Wilmothurst that yet accrued to him, had put the matter in the hands of his legal agents, who, curiously enough, were Messrs Taype, Shawrpe, and Scrawly, of Gray's Inn; and things were at a serious crisis when Jerry returned home to find a deadlier enmity than ever in his mother's heart at "that creature Chevenix and the forward minx his daughter."

The latter knew of Jerry's arrival; her heart had beat responsive to the clangour of the village bells, the music of the volunteer band which preceded the carriage in which he came, and the cheers of the warm-hearted rustics, who unharnessed the horses and drew it along; and ere long she heard with pity and anxiety from Mademoiselle Florine, whom she chanced to meet, that he was confined to his room—even to his bed—by a return of the treacherous jungle-fever, which is apt to recur at times unexpectedly for months after recovery is thought certain; and while in this condition, helpless and incapable of action, he was galled and tormented, and his jealousy was roused by his mother and cousin Emily with the real information of how the mortgages stood; that Lord Twesildown had heard of them, and with any eye to possessing Wilmothurst and Langley Park intended to degrade himself by proposing for Bella Chevenix, now that she would be a Hampshire heiress, as his mother, Lady Ashcombe, had the very bad taste to inform them.

And Jerry writhed in his bed when he heard of these things, and times there were when he wished that after all he had found his grave, like many more, on the wooded banks of the Prah.

Twesildown had an estate, though a rather encumbered one; but he had also a title and undeniable good looks. Jerry was now well-nigh a landless man. Bella had suspected, he feared, the purity and disinterestedness of his love, and thus circumstances, he thought, were all against her viewing him with favour.

If the worst came to the worst, and he were sold up, he would effect an exchange for India, and think of her no more.

No more—how hard it was!

Just then, in his soreness of heart, Jerry was not sorry that

a legitimate fit of illness detained him in the house at Wilmothurst, and separate from Bella ; for he was hourly stung by tidings—exaggerated in some instances—that Lord Twesildown was daily giving her drives with his mother, and mounts of his best horses ; and, as he was known to be rather impecunious, and quite *au fait* of the fact that Bella Chevenix was her father's heiress, Jerry felt jealous, mortified, and bitter. He even sorely regretted the “gushing” farewell letter he had written to her before entering Coomassie ; and could little conceive that even now, in a silken case, she wore that letter in her bosom !

It was quite evident how hotly jealous he was of Twesildown, and this sentiment Cousin Emily left nothing undone or unsaid to fan.

“How you chatter, cousin !” said he, impatiently.

“I am like the brook, you think, on this subject,” said Emily, with one of her sweetest smiles.

“What brook ?”

“I go on for ever.”

“By Jove, you do—and with a will, too !” said Jerry, who was now stretched at full length in a hammock netting between two trees on the lawn, lazily enjoying one of the last box of cigars he might open in Wilmothurst, as his family were contemplating a removal therefrom, and for where was quite undecided.

Mr. Chevenix had courteously left his card for Jerry, so Bella knew that, come what might, the latter in common civility would call ere long ; and to that event she was looking forward now ; but days passed, and Jerry came not.

And so while Bella, remembering the tenor of her last farewell meeting with Jerry, and that of the treasured letter, which amounted to a declaration, was eating her heart out with disappointment that he made no effort to see her, he was daily being “primed up” by Cousin Emily with jealousy of Twesildown ; and *this* was the time to which he and she had both looked forward so eagerly !

The bitterness of this situation was enhanced to Jerry by the knowledge that his ancient inheritance of Wilmothurst was Bella's *dot*, and known to be such by Twesildown, to whom it was a lure quite as much as her undoubted brilliance and beauty.

“There is the devil to pay and pitch-hot here about the

mortgages," he wrote to Bevil Goring; "and moreover, old fellow, I am sorely disappointed in my love affair. I have read that what 'drives one man to drink drives another to the *demi-monde*.' Whether of the two is worse, the immortal gods can tell. Either remedy is worse than the disease, I fancy. But anyway a few months more will see me again broiling up country, and going in for iced drinks and Chinsurah cheroots."

CHAPTER LVIII.

IN BAYSWATER.

"TWENTY years old to-day—twenty years!" murmured Alison, as she glanced at herself in the little mirror, and thought how pale and how much older than her age she looked in her plain black mourning dress, which was destitute of other ornament than smooth white cuffs and a ruche or frill of lace, or some such soft material, round her slender throat.

Vividly came back to the girl's memory her other birthdays, ere poverty fell upon her father, and ere she was—as now—alone in the world, and when each recurring anniversary found her loaded with caresses, congratulations, and pretty presents. And she could recall her fourth birthday at Essilmont, when she was a little child in a white embroidered frock, with a broad sash matching the colour of her dark blue eyes, with her brothers, Ranald and Ellon, eating strawberries off a huge salver held for them by Archie Auchindoir, who seemed an old Archie even then.

Never more would the kisses or caresses of father or mother touch her brow or cheek; and now she was in the ranks of those who have to earn their daily bread as a governess on thirty pounds per annum, teach French, English, and music to two little girls of the ages of nine and ten respectively.

And sadly on this day she thought of all that had befallen her, and how completely Bevil Goring had passed out of her life, apparently for ever! Wearily too her eye went round the bare school-room in that stately house in Pembridge Square, Bayswater—a long, low-ceiled apartment, with two windows that overlooked Westbourne Grove, a grove only in name now.

The vicar of Chilcote procured her this situation, and, beyond her name and his recommendation, her employer, Mrs. S. De Jobbys, knew nothing of Alison Cheyne and cared not to inquire. The vicar had written lately to state that a handsome marble cross—a Celtic one he believed it was called—had lately been placed by a friend above her father's grave, and Alison's heart swelled with gratitude as she read of it.

It must have been done by Lord Cadbury, she thought. Who else could have done so?

She had now been two months in Pembridge Square—two whole months—and despite the unwonted drudgery of teaching, and the dreariness of routine—despite slights, almost insults, that were offered, perhaps unconsciously, by the cold-hearted and the underbred, the time had slipped quickly away.

Thus condemned to the dull drudgery of daily teaching a couple of troublesome, peevish, and ill-tempered brats in that bare and comfortless school-room, was Alison, a loving and passionate girl, made more passionate, loving, and tender by the sore griefs she had known, but all unsoured by these and the doubtful prospect—yea, the utter blank of her future.

Though the change of condition was not much to Alison, the change of *position* and that vacuity of the future were frightful to the poor girl; and in taking the situation for the sake of her father's name and his old family pride, though he was now in his grave, she had besought the vicar of Chilcote, in recommending her to Mrs. S. De Jobbys, to conceal what she had ever been—nay, was still—the daughter of a baronet of Nova Scotia, whose diploma dated from 1625.

The family of Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbys consisted of three daughters, the eldest, Miss Victoria, of whom more anon, was in her nineteenth year, and Alison's two pupils, Irene and Iseulte. Like the rest of the snobocracy of the metropolis she believed in double names, thus she figured in the royal Blue-Book as Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbys, a style of address which would have astonished her late husband, worthy old David or D. Jobbys, as he called himself, when for many a year he was acquiring wealth as an industrious soap-boiler in Bow East, and when he married pretty little Sally Slumpkins, the barmaid at the "Black Swan" in Mile-End Road, and when she little foresaw how wealthy a "relict" she would be left.

Pretty Sally, who had, of course, preferred the worthy soap-boiler to his rival the potman, had now, amid ease and much

good living, expanded into a stout, blowzy, and coarsely-featured matron, greatly puffed up by wealth, success, pride, and vanity.

She always wore the richest materials and the most massive jewellery, and never omitted to figure in her open carriage in the Row, when weather permitted, and strove hard in everything to ape all the manners of the "upper ten," in which she was fully seconded by her eldest born, Miss Victoria S. De Jobbyns, a rather pretty, but very insipid girl, who wore her hair frizzed into her eyes, and had a nose more than retroussé, for though she was pretty, as we have said, her features were nevertheless of the genuine Cockney type.

Alison took all her meals in the schoolroom with the children, and at the early hours which were directed for them. She was never in the drawing-room—"the British drawing-room," that sanctum sacred to Mrs. De Jobbyns and her "swell" visitors, as she called them, and when she thought it was "rather the thing" to have afternoon tea in dragon blue and white crockery on a beautiful Chippendale table.

And so, for thirty pounds per annum, Alison underwent this life of mortification.

"Thirty pound a year, and her laundry work, my dear," as Mrs. De Jobbyns informed her friend, Mrs. Popkins-Robbynson.

"That is very cheap for one evidently so accomplished," said the latter.

"Very cheap, indeed; but she is such a good style for the children, you know; and really I think she must have been some one of—of—well, means once."

"Why?"

"The richly laced under-garments she sends to the laundry would quite surprise you, my dear."

"But won't her Scotch haccent spile the young 'uns?" observed Mr. Popkins-Robbynson.

"Not at all; and she seems to get on so nicely with the servants. They all adore her."

"Indeed!"

"My last governess, Miss Smythe—Smythe was always at war with them."

"How?"

"They never paid her sufficient deference. Oh, what a nuisance that woman was; yet we paid her forty pounds a year—actually what we pays the cook, my dear."

To be near his young mistress, to watch over her, as he thought, and to be able to see her from time to time, old Archie had located himself in a humble lodging in Moscow Road, not far from the square, where he lived with the strictest frugality, fearing that a time might come when his "three hunner pounds," or what remained of them, might be of service to *her*, "as hained gear helps weel," and often, with more patience than even a lover might have had, he promenaded the square for hours, watching for a sight of her at the school-room windows, or till she came forth with her pupils to walk in Kensington Gardens—watching for her till he in turn was watched, as one bent on something nefarious, by the policeman at the corner.

And ere long the two little girls began to wonder who the funny old man was that so often hovered near them in their walks, who treated their governess with such profound deference and devotion, and was never unprovided with chocolate creams and so forth for them—"sweeties for the bairns," as he called them.

But often Alison sat up in her little white bed, in her bare and rather comfortless room, in the darkness of the silent night, and, looking at the stars, would ask why she was so lonely in the world now—she who was born with the prospect of a very different state of existence! Then would come all her dream-memories of the past, with those other dreams of what *might be*, did fortune prove more kind. How long it seemed ago since she had her father to nurse and Cadbury to shun—longer still since she had known the joy of Bevil's love, and the stolen meetings under the solemn and whispering beeches of Chilcote.

Chilcote was lonely; but how lovely it seemed to her in memory now! She even found herself at times now indulging in the two conundrums—the modern pessimist's speculations—Is civilisation a failure, and is life worth living?

The monotony of the school-room was now occasionally broken by visits—few and far between, certainly—of the eldest daughter of the house, Miss De Jobbyns, who had returned from a sojourn with some friends at Hastings—a young lady rather loud in tone and fast in manner. She had early discovered that Alison was dexterous in the way of embroidering, and thus kept her little hands busy, when not otherwise occupied, in tracing out her monogram and crest—for she had that,

of course—in the corners of handkerchiefs, interspersed with forget-me-nots, rose-sprays, and fern-leaves.

Miss Victoria De Jobbys (she had originally been christened Sarah, but that name was dropped now as vulgar) had from the first felt an emotion of pique that her little sisters' governess should be so ladylike, so perfectly patrician in air and bearing, and, more than all, so uselessly handsome ; for, of course, she thought, of what use is beauty to a governess?

Her mother's first idea had been, what a perilous inmate in a house if there had been a grown-up son ; but apart from her being a paid dependent, her very loveliness was an all-sufficient reason for secluding her in the school-room, and never permitting her to be seen by guests or visitors, especially of the male sex.

"You are Scotch?" said the young lady, abruptly and interrogatively, on the occasion of her first visit.

"Yes."

"And yet you don't look a bit Scotch, or talk like them either."

* Alison smiled as she wondered what the young lady thought the natives of the North were like.

"Where do your people live—in the Highlands?"

"My family are—all dead."

"I see you are in mourning—all dead—everyone?"

"Yes," replied Alison, curtly.

"How funny!"

Alison stared at this peculiar remark.

"What was that you were playing when I came in?" asked her visitor.

"A mazurka of Chopin's."

"*Shopang*—who is he? And how well you sing, too."

"I am glad you think so," replied Alison, who sometimes accompanied herself on the old, ill-tuned, and twangling school-room piano.

"Ma will be having you to play at her weekly receptions."

Alison shivered at the bare idea of figuring thus among such people as were there.

"Were you trained for the stage, or was your father a professional?—of course he was."

"He was *not*," said Alison, sharply, and at this blunt remark her soft violet eyes seemed to become hard and blue as a steel sword-blade ; the little colour she had died out of her face, and

she looked ten years older ; but her blunt visitor—she of the frizzed, sandy hair, and snub-nose—mistook the cause of her emotion, and said : “ You have had private trouble, I suppose ? ”

Alison was silent.

“ Tell me,” continued the irrepressible Miss De Jobbyns, “ have you ever been in love ? ”

“ In truth—I have been.”

“ And your young man—he is dead, too, I suppose ? ”

“ He I refer to is dead, at least to me,” replied Alison, wearily ; “ but here come my pupils, so please to let me resume their tasks.”

CHAPTER LIX.

THE FOUR-IN-HAND CLUB.

ONE of the chief, if not the only, pleasure of Alison’s routine was, on sunny days, to take her little charges into Kensington Gardens, and set them by the margin of the blue Round Pond, and watch its tiny fleet of toy ships skimming to and fro, with the hideous Dutch-looking Palace of Kensington as a background—a palace, the rooms of which are only remarkable for memories of William of Orange (and, let us add, of Glencoe) and Elizabeth Villiers, the hideous one-eyed Countess of Orkney ; but stately, even grand, are the avenues of old trees that grow thereby. “ How many secrets have been heard by these ancient elms since Heneage Finch built the boundary-fence of his pleasance ! Could their experience be set forth for the behoof of modern lovers, would they be apt,” asks a writer, “ to encourage or to warn ? ”

The old palace is still there as it was when the home of the Finches, with its three irregular quadrangles, built of red brick, ornamented with columns, quoins, and cornices of indifferent stone, unchanged as when Solmes’ Blues mounted guard and the early Georges swore and blustered in broken English and guttural German ; but how changed are all its surroundings, for miles upon miles of streets stretch far to the westward, southward, and northward of it now !

When James VI., accustomed to old Edinburgh within its “ Flodden Wall,” was so startled with the size of the petty

London of his time that, in his famous speech in the Star Chamber in 1616, he declared that its size made it a nuisance to the nation, that he would have all new edifices pulled down, and the builders committed to prison, he could little foresee the London of the days of steam !

And often, as she sat there under the stately trees, Alison loved to ponder over the days when the old Court suburb was remote from London, for in 1750, where now we find busy Westbourne Grove, stood a solitary house, called Western Green, three miles distant from Hyde Park ; and so lately as 1830, on the Bayswater side of the Gardens, were Kensington Gravel Pits, facing the Broad Walk, stretching away to what is now called Bayswater, which was formerly renowned for the springs and conduits for which the city was then indebted for pure water. It was famous then for its tea gardens, there called the Flora, extending the whole length of Lancaster Gate.

So, book in hand, while the children played near her on the grass, Alison would sit in Kensington Gardens for hours lost in reverie, while the bees hummed in the hot air at the flower-beds near the Serpentine, and the sun blazed without mercy on the sheet of shining water that stretched away towards the Albert Gate ; but, when certain thoughts of the past occurred to her, there would seem no beauty in that summer scene, nor warmth even in the sunshine, for there was a dull, weary, and aching crave at her heart, with the ever-recurring question—Where was Bevil, and why did he not make an effort to seek her out ?

She knew not that the only person who could enlighten him as to her movements—the vicar of Chilcote—had steadily refused to do so.

On such occasions old Archie was generally hovering about for a sight of her ; and, if he could exchange a word with her, would steal away to his dingy lodgings “ as happy as a king,” to use his own phrase ; and muttering—“ The Lord will watch owre her—the Lord will watch owre her—like ilka blade o’ grass that keps its ain drap o’ dew.”

One day she extended her walk beyond the boundary of the Gardens, and, crossing the bridge near the powder magazine, watched with feverish eagerness the crowds of fashionables who were gathering in their thousands there ; for it was the 17th of May, when there was to be a muster of the Four-in-Hand Club,

and she had a strange presentiment that she should see Bevil Goring—one of those presentiments which come unbidden to the mind, perhaps more often to the Scottish mind than any other—why or how, we know not—but which seem to speak of that which is to come as powerfully as ever did those oracles of old that whispered through the mist of Delphi, or by the black doves of Dodona; and she was not doomed to be—in one sense at least—disappointed.

Amid the fast gathering crowds and the general excitement of the scene she was careful not to lose sight of her little charges, whose tiny hands she clasped in her own, and kept them close by her side.

She saw Cadbury ride past, accompanied by Gaskins his groom; and while the sight gave her a kind of shock, she shrank behind a tree, lest he should perceive her, and some minutes elapsed ere she ventured from her hiding place.

Natheless his peerage, aware of his plebeian descent and certainly not distinguished appearance, instead of appearing fashionably attired like a London park rider, Cadbury affected the style of a country gentleman; and on this day—though a most indifferent horseman—he wore Bedford cord breeches, and black polished boots, an ordinary cut-away coat buttoned over the chest, a hat rather low in the crown, and carried a light hunting-whip, affecting the air of one who flew over his fences “like a bird,” though not unfrequently he was landed on one side, while his horse remained on the other; and he rode over the hounds, and committed many similar unpardonable faults in the field.

At this narrowly escaped rencontre she felt her colour come and go—come and go—quickly. The man’s appearance brought back with a rush, and vividly, a host of painful and annoying memories; and then there was the thousand pounds cheque sent anonymously and the marble cross so mysteriously erected at her father’s grave.

Oh, was she right, or was she wrong in avoiding him?

Nowhere in Europe can such a sight be seen as that presented on such a day beside the Serpentine when the meet of the Four-in-Hand Club takes place. All London seemed to be looking its brightest and best, and all London—at least the fashionable world thereof—seemed to have found some excuse for being in the vicinity of the Serpentine Bridge and the powder magazine which stands thereby.

It was May, and the young trees were in full foliage, and the parterres of rhododendrons and azaleas were in bloom ; and gathering there were the beauty and fashion of the greatest city in the world, with the best horse-flesh, the most accomplished drivers, and the most perfect drags, with shining panels and plated harness.

On either side of the drive all the hawthorns, pink and white, were in bloom, loading the morning air with the perfume of the almond ; and the waters of the Serpentine were seen at intervals between the flowery shrubs and long avenues of leafy trees in all the fresh greenery of May ; but as Alison looked around her she thought of Essilmont in May—Essilmont, which too probably she would never see again, with the pool in the Ythan where the Black Hound appeared when one of her race was drowned in it ; where the gray-clad angler loved to linger by the stream in the silvery morning mist ; where the black gled crowed overhead as he winged his way across the purple heather, or the cushet doo cooed with bell-like note in the pine coppice, and the high antlers of the stag were seen as he couched amid the cool and fan-leaved bracken.

But the acclamations of the little girls who clung to her hands or skirts roused Alison from her reverie, for the procession had started, and above thirty drags, horsed magnificently, with splendid silver harness blazing in the sunshine, were getting into motion, their drivers—when not clad in the club uniform, blue, with gilt buttons—wearing accurate morning costume, while the dresses of the many ladies who crowded the lofty seats on the roof, were such as only Regent Street can furnish—and for beauty, no other city on earth could have produced such women as were seen there, in carriages or on foot.

Team after team went past, the German Ambassador with his bays, the Guards' drag with four glossy blacks, the Hussars from Hounslow, chestnuts, grays, and roans, all criticised and critically examined by the onlookers, and surrounded by Hyde Park in all its glory, the route being taken from the magazine to Hyde Park Corner, thence by Knightsbridge Barracks, passing the Albert Memorial, and out by the Queen's Gate, where the whole passed away like a phantasmagoria from the eyes of Alison, whose gaze followed the line of drags like one lost in a painful dream, after her heart had given the first bound of bewilderment, on seeing that the leading coach was driven by Bevil Goring !

She had seen a dashing drag drawn by a team of beautiful roans, and certainly her heart beat painfully with joy, amazement, and then with something of mortification, when she recognised in the driver thereof, "tooling along in a most workmanlike manner," as a bystander remarked, her *fiancé*, Bevil Goring, while on the top seats were Jerry Wilmot, Tony Dalton, young Fleming, and others of the Rifles, with Laura, and several ladies, some of whom were seated close behind Goring, and in animated conversation with him, one of them apparently a rather flirty party, who insisted on shading his eyes sometimes with her scarlet silk parasol.

She again shrank behind a tree, as she had done when Cadbury came in sight. Her gaze, and her heart too, followed the gay drag with its roans and brilliant party going away to luncheon, no doubt at Muswell Hill, and she watched it until it disappeared.

How she got through the remainder of the day in the dull school-room on the attic floor in Pembridge Square, she scarcely knew; but the next was considerably advanced before she saw an account of the coaching meet in a fashionable paper, and read that "Captain Goring of the Rifles' drag and team were considered by eminent connoisseurs as the most perfect in the park." A little further on she saw that at his rooms in Piccadilly he had, after the meet, entertained a number of the club at dinner, with many persons of distinction, including H.R.H. the F.M. commanding, and one or two foreign ambassadors.

His drag and team! What a change was here! Poor Alison was indeed sorely bewildered; but on reflection the change failed to give her joy. Here were evidences of great and sudden wealth, and yet he made no effort to discover her. And those ladies on the drag, who were they? And who was she who seemed so familiar with him, and to whose playful remarks he stooped to listen from time to time?

Alas! it seemed as if his neglect of her was quite accounted for now. She suppressed a great desire to sob aloud, and half drew her engagement ring from her finger. Then, with true superstition of the heart, she carefully replaced it, as she did a locket which contained his likeness, and which she wore in the breast of her dress; but the episode of that day and all it vaguely suggested added sorely to the already sufficient bitterness of the poor girl's governess life.

She knew not that though, in accordance with his recently-acquired wealth and position, his own tastes, and the wishes of friends, Bevil had started a drag and joined the Four-in-Hand Club, he had been baffled resolutely more than once in his efforts to trace her by the well-meaning vicar of Chilcote, and that he was in perpetual anxiety to discover her, and was trusting to hope that her father's death on one hand and his own ample means had removed the barrier that the former had raised between them.

It is the fate of true love apparently never to run like a railway. "But why that proverbial asperity should be confined to what is true we are unable to say," writes a novelist, adding, "For our own part, that eternal smoothness has but little charm; and the ripple which reflects sunshine and shade, bright gleams and darkening clouds in love as in Nature, gives brightness and variety to the prosiest poetry in the world."

But doubtless Goring and Alison Cheyne were beginning to think that they had endured enough of the darkening clouds that seemed as yet without a silver lining.

CHAPTER LX.

HUMILIATION.

HAD Goring indeed forgotten or ceased to love her? This was the ever-recurring question in the mind of Alison now, and she recalled the lines of the Spanish song, *Vanse mis amores*, as applicable to herself:

How could I bear—how bear disdain,
Who not the slightest favour ever
Received without a blush of pain?
How could I bear disdain? Oh, never!
One hour of absence, swift and brief,
I could not bear—how should I bear
A long and tedious age of grief,
An age of grief, of gloom and fear?
For I am young, and—oh, sincere.

If Goring was, as she thought bitterly and repiningly, remiss in attempting to trace her or not caring to do so, as her heart at times began to forebode, she certainly would not and could

not throw herself in his way; she could but wait and hope, suffer and endure.

But one day she had an unexpected annoyance to encounter.

While the two little girls with the fantastic names, Irene and Iseulte, played on the grass near her in Kensington Gardens, seated under the shadow of the trees, she was reading—or trying to read, for her mind was ever preoccupied—a railway volume, she became conscious that a man was hovering near, indeed, hanging over her. She looked up and instantly recognised Sir Jasper Dehorsey—or Captain Smith, as she supposed him to be—regarding her with his calm and insolent though admiring and *insouciant* smile. He lifted his hat, and said with a bow: “I knew I was not mistaken; there could not be another like my little runaway of Antwerp.”

Alison blushed scarlet with intense annoyance and then grew pale with alarm, she felt herself so friendless and alone. Finding her silent he spoke again.

“We have met before—you remember me, I hope?”

“Sir, I have no wish to remember you, and still less to renew the acquaintance,” said Alison, quitting her seat.

“Now, that’s too bad,” said Dehorsey, deliberately barring her way; “too bad indeed. If my admiration of you——”

“Please to remember that I cannot listen to your insolence. These children to whom I am governess——”

“Governess—you—here is a game!” said he, mockingly. “Ahoi, girls—run after this, find it and keep it!”

Taking a crown piece from his purse, he spun it along the grass to some distance, and the girls rushed after it to search for and find it, a task of some difficulty.

“Sir, sir,” said Alison, tremulous with indignation, “you ought not to have done that.”

“Why?”

“I am the governess of these girls, and responsible for them.”

“Absurd—a governess, you! One might as well expect to see a queen or a professional beauty filling the post. Clever this governess dodge of yours,” he continued, with a kind of insolence peculiar to himself. “I suppose these girls are your nieces—little decoy ducklings to play propriety? And how is our mutual friend, old Cad—I mean Lord Cadbury? Seen him lately? No answer? Quarrelled, I suppose—these things never last long; but you are as charming as ever. How bad

of you to leave me as you did that night in the Café au Progrès !”

Alison called the children to her side and walked away. There was in her whole air and manner a conscious dignity that might have quieted the presumptuous coxcomb and *roué* who dared to address her, while affliction had touched her features with something in expression that was beyond even beauty ; but Dehorsey was one of those men who had a total disbelief in any feminine purity.

“Where do you live, little one ?” he asked, while deliberately following her.

Alison made no reply, but looked round to see if Archie was near. He was in sight, but an appeal to him just then would have been unwise, for, old though he was, Dehorsey would have felt the full weight of his walking staff.

“How dare you, coward that you are, to molest me thus ?” exclaimed Alison.

“A rough word from such lips as yours,” he said, mockingly, but changing colour nevertheless ; “but as an old friend——”

“Friend !”

“*Votre pardon*, mademoiselle—acquaintance then.”

Alison quitted the Gardens in haste, and hurried home with her two charges ; and she was afterwards compelled to relinquish promenading there, one of her chief pleasures, as Dehorsey was always on the watch for her, and more than once had followed her at a little distance to the door of the house in Pembroke Square.

She was thus obliged to remain more indoors than she was wont to do ; and, to add to her annoyance there, she was considerably afflicted by much more than she relished of the society of the loud and fast Miss De Jobbys ; for that young lady had recently found an admirer, or—as she confidently alleged—a lover, and in her vanity and exultation was never weary of expatiating to Alison on his merits and wealth, his looks, his phrases, his dress, the “button-holes” she made for him, and how she and her mamma contrived to waylay him in the Park or the Row and elsewhere, to all of which Alison listened wearily and without interest, not even caring to inquire his name.

She had her own sad thoughts of love, and they were enough for her.

“I should like you to see him when he comes to mamma’s

weekly reception," continued the young lady, as she frizzed up her hair and practised *willades* at herself in Alison's little mirror, "but as a rule mamma never intrudes a governess on friends—excuse me saying so."

"I am aware of that," replied Alison, softly, and heedless of the cutting rudeness of the speech.

"Since Miss Smythe—Smythe was here, she fancies that governesses require to be snubbed."

"Why?"

"As a matter of principle, I suppose; but, upon my soul, I think it is rather hard upon you," continued this slangy young person. "We met him at Mr. Taype the lawyer's house, in Sussex Gardens, and, as he is rich, mamma fastened on him at once for me, don't you know; oh, isn't it fun?"

"Are you engaged then?" asked Alison, when Miss De Jobbys had expatiated on the subject for more than half an hour.

"Engaged—oh, no—not exactly yet—but it is only a matter of time. He showed a great desire to cultivate our family; or rather mamma determined to cultivate *him*. But, hang it all! He is very shy for an officer, and leaves me to do the spooning actually."

"He is in the army then?"

"Yes; and hangs out at Aldershot."

Alison felt her colour change at the name of that locality; but she only said: "Miss De Jobbys, you should not use the fast phrases you do."

"Well, ma uses them; ma always does."

She did not add, that which perhaps she did not know, that her "ma" had whilom been most accomplished in "sherry-glass flirtations" while behind the bar at the "Black Swan."

"Isn't spoon English?" she asked.

"It is slang."

"Is it? Well, if the verb "to spoon" is slang, I like it—that is all! But I wish I could flirt."

"For what purpose?"

"To draw him on. But simply I can't do it, he is so stand-off in his manner."

"Why?"

"It is not my *forte*; I wish it was. There is Miss Le Robbynson, she can flirt with a dozen of men at once, and even make them quarrel about her."

"But men as a rule dislike flirts, and don't marry them; and flirting is pretending to care for a person when you don't."

"Ah, but I care a great deal for this fellow."

"Fellow?" queried Alison, on whose delicate ear this girl's phraseology jarred sorely.

"Well, my military beau?"

"You should not adopt this style."

"You are not my governess!" retorted Miss De Jobbyns, with some asperity.

"Some day, no doubt, I shall see your intended."

The daughter of the house blushed with pleasure at the phrase; but thought that, with a governess so undeniably handsome, it might be better that no meeting took place as yet. Suddenly she said: "You have some fellow's photo that you wear at your neck; you have it on now," she added, making a clutch at a ribbon which encircled the slender throat of Alison, who instinctively drew back and placed a hand upon her bosom.

"Some fellow's photo!—how *can* you use such a style of language?" she asked, haughtily.

"I have told you before that you are not *my* governess, and I won't be lectured by you; but as for the photo——"

"It is not a photo I wear to-day."

"What then?"

"An ornament which I wear because—because——"

"What?" asked Miss De Jobbyns, impatiently.

"It is the anniversary of papa's birth."

"And you won't show it to me?"

"I have not said so," replied Alison, gently, as she drew up the object from her bosom. It was her father's badge, and the badge of his father before him, as a baronet of Nova Scotia—a gold oval species of medal, bearing in a scutcheon, *argent*, a St. Andrew's cross, *azure*, with thereon an inescutcheon of the royal arms of Scotland, with an imperial crown, and the motto of Henry, Duke of Rothesay, "*Fax mentis honestæ gloria*."

Miss De Jobbyns, who had never seen anything of the kind before, surveyed it with equal wonder and admiration.

"What a funny thing! I would so like to wear it at a ball to-night," she exclaimed.

"Excuse me," replied Alison, as she replaced it in her bosom, "but I cannot lend it."

"How greedy of you! Then you will sell it, perhaps?"

"*Sell it!*" repeated Alison, with an inflexion of voice that struck even the dull ear of the soap-boiler's daughter. "Not for worlds!"

"I thought you said that your father was dead."

"He is dead."

"Then who is that queer-looking old Scotsman whom Irene and Iseulte see speaking to you sometimes?"

"He was my father's faithful valet, and is now my faithful friend," replied Alison, with mingled hauteur and emotion.

"Dear me! how romantic—how funny! But I suppose you will have no place now to spend your holidays in?"

"None," sighed Alison, who had never thought of them till then, and she looked round the bare, bleak school-room, the scene of her daily toil, and where nearly all her time was passed now; but just then the carriage was announced, and she was relieved of the oppressive society of the somewhat irrepressible Miss Victoria De Jobbys.

If the children talked thus of poor old Archie Auchindoir, they might speak of the insolent "Captain Smith." Thus she might lose her situation and be again cast on the world. Oh, how tempest-tossed was her poor little heart!

The perfect, self-possessed, and ladylike manner of Alison was to a certain extent lost upon the rather rough, pampered, and hoydenish damsel who had just driven off to the Row to meet her admirer, no doubt, and who saw in her only a paid dependant, whom her mother might discard like one of the housemaids at an hour's notice or less. Her sweet nature, her natural lightness and cheerfulness, her readiness and wish to oblige, yet never intrusively in any way, were all lost on the coarse natures of those among whom her evil fortune had cast her.

She was glad that on this particular day, inspired by filial reverence, she had substituted the relic of her father for the locket which contained the photo of Bevil Goring, whose face she would have shrunk from subjecting to the off-hand criticism of the young lady who had just left her; and she was not without a stronger fear that the military lover of Miss De Jobbys—if lover he was—was the *roué* Dehorsey, who now haunted Kensington Gardens and Pembroke Square, though "Captain Smith" seemed scarcely the kind of man to be captivated by the soap-boiler's daughter.

CHAPTER LXI.

MISS DE JOBBYNS' ADMIRER.

"You will be good enough to keep the children quiet and amused this evening, Miss Cheyne," said Mrs. De Jobbys, "as we have company coming to dinner. Also have them nicely dressed, as they may be sent for to dessert or to the drawing-room."

Being now used to be spoken to in this style, Alison merely bowed, on which Mrs. De Jobbys said sharply: "You heard me, I presume?"

"Yes; you certainly spoke loud enough."

Mrs. De Jobbys frowned. She would have liked her to add "ma'am," like any other paid dependant; but Alison, of course, never thought of such a thing.

"You may withdraw now, Miss Cheyne," said the lady, with an assumption of would-be dignity that sat rather absurdly on the whilom dispenser of glasses of gin and bitters and pints of stout at the bar of the "Black Swan."

"Oh, Miss Cheyne, I wonder when the wedding is to be!" exclaimed little Irene, when Alison returned to the school-room.

"Whose wedding, dear?" she asked.

"Why, Vic's; don't you know she is going to be married to that rich military swell?"

"Oh, fie, Irene—you must not use such terms!"

"Why not? I heard cook call him so when she told the tablemaid, and said we two girls would be bridesmaids."

Intent on a book she had procured—by the way, save photographic albums in which the De Jobbys family were reproduced endlessly, there were no books in the house—Alison thought no more of the matter; but when evening was drawing on she heard the soft rustle of a long silken skirt, as Miss De Jobbys, arrayed for conquest, swept in, wearing a really beautiful costume of dark blue velvet and light blue silk, smothered with cream-tinted lace.

"He is coming—he is coming to dinner—mamma got him to promise that he would, at last!" exclaimed the young lady, pirouetting about in the extravagance of her joy. "Tell me how you like my dress?"

"It is indeed exquisite—in material," replied Alison, who of course had dined in the school-room with her pupils at one o'clock, and felt little or no interest to learn that Miss Victoria's lover or admirer, was coming to a little dinner *en famille* at seven p.m.

"He will soon be here—how do you think I look?" she asked for the third or fourth time.

As Alison's delicate fingers were adjusting some parts of the lace, the sharp eyes of Miss De Jobbys observed—as they had often done before—the ring, the engagement-ring, which the former had received from *her* lover, under the whispering beeches, one evening.

"It is very beautiful, and must be valuable," said Miss De Jobbys, examining it closely.

"It *is* valuable.

"Too much so, I think, for—for one teaching to wear."

"When it was given to me, teaching was not thought of," said Alison in a low, sad voice.

"I have no end of lovely rings; but," urged the girl, who was by nature covetous, "you might lend it to me just for to-night, though you wouldn't lend that funny ornament for the Le Robbynson's ball."

"Excuse me," replied Alison, coldly, "it never leaves my finger."

"Not even when you wash your hands?"

"Not even then."

"You will spoil these beautiful stones."

"It shall never be seen on another hand while I live."

"Indeed," sneered Miss De Jobbys; "and thereby hangs a tale, I suppose. Upon my Sam you are very romantic! Of course you got it from the fellow whose photo you wear, but will let no one see?"

Alison made no reply, but her colour came and went with annoyance at the girl's *brusquerie*; and the latter began to chant the praises of her admirer, a subject of which her listener was utterly weary.

"He has we don't know how many thousands a year—think of that; oh my! Talking of love, I heard him say laughingly to mamma, who was chaffing him on the subject, that he would not be in love with anyone again."

"And what of that?"

"He meant, of course, with anyone again but *me*."

"How do you construe his remark thus?"

"Because his eyes met mine as he said so: and I do hope I blushed—I am sure I did."

"And he is rich, you say?"

"Yes, rich enough to satisfy even mamma."

"That is fortunate," replied Alison, with a sigh, as she recalled her father's bitter opposition to her own engagement, and all the wiles and worry of Cadbury.

"Fortunate indeed; but there is about Bevil——"

"BEVIL!" exclaimed Alison, startled by the uncommon name.

"Don't snap me up so! Yes, Bevil is his name—sweetly pretty I think it—Bevil Goring."

"And he is rich, you say?"

"Yes; has twenty or thirty thousand a year at least."

"It cannot be the same, though the conjunction of name is very singular," said Alison in her agitated heart.

"Is he a merchant," she asked, "a City man?"

"City be hanged!" responded this impulsive young woman. "He is an officer—a captain in the Rifle Brigade, and, when not in town, hangs out at Aldershot. But there is a carriage; the people are arriving, and I must be off."

She quickly withdrew, leaving Alison pale as a corpse, trembling in every limb, and rooted to the spot, propping herself by a hand on the table, till she sank into a chair, oblivious of the wonder with which the two little girls regarded her sudden, and, to them, unaccountable emotion.

For some time her thoughts were terrible. She recalled the drag alleged by the public prints to be Goring's—the entertainment, given even to royalty, at "his rooms in Piccadilly," all evidences of wealth that must have come to him since the time she was decoyed to the Continent, and, in fact, of that wealth—the absence of which was the cause of her father's hostility to the last hour of his life—this girl's remarks now confirmed her!

That Bevil Goring could love or even admire such a girl—a man so refined and delicate in tastes and ideas—she never for a moment imagined; but what did the whole situation and that girl's boastful allegations mean? How came he to know such people, despite their great wealth, and permit them to cultivate his acquaintance? Yet matters seemed to have progressed so far that even the servants were canvassing the prospects of a *wedding*!

More than all, why, oh why had he never attempted to discover her, to trace her out, in these her days of poverty and sore trial!

The magnitude and multitude of her thoughts overwhelmed her; among these were emotions of sharp but just pride, keen disappointment, bitterest doubt, and agonising mortification; but her tears—usually so ready to flow—came not to relieve her now, and she was only roused from a kind of feverish stupefaction by the entrance of a servant to light the candles and conduct “the young ladies downstairs to dessert,” an invitation to which they responded with instant alacrity.

Stooping over the stair-banister, she heard *his* voice once or twice as the male guests filed off to the drawing-room after the ladies, and it thrilled through her heart. A choking lump rose in her throat, but still not a tear would come.

After a time she was roused by someone addressing her. It was a servant, by nature saucy, underbred, illiterate, and disposed to be impertinent in general when she could be so with impunity.

“Were you addressing me?” asked Alison.

“Yes; the missis says as you are to tittivate yourself a bit and come down to the drawing-room.”

“I am to—*what*?” asked Alison, sharply—for her at least.

“Tittivate yourself—it is Henglish; but, bein’ Scotch, perhaps you don’t know what it means.”

“I am not going to the—drawing-room to-night.”

“You won’t obey the missus?” exclaimed the servant, aghast.

“Certainly not in this instance.”

“Don’t you know your place? You are only a guv’ness, and guv’nesses ain’t ladies, whatever they may think.”

“What are they?”

“Mock ones.”

“Leave the room instantly—or——”

“Or what?” asked the girl, sharply.

“I’ll get you turned out of the house.”

The girl withdrew uttering as Parthian shots some remarks about “hupstarts hordering their betters about.”

In a few minutes Miss De Jobbys, with some irritation of manner, appeared to prefer the same request, adding that she was wanted for a hand at whist.

“To come down to play whist? Is not this an unusual condescension?” asked Alison.

"Yes," was the cool response ; "ma thinks it part of your duty to make yourself generally useful ; and I suppose you can play whist?"

The girl was too underbred to be aware how heartless was the *sang froid*, in which she suggested, or commanded, that Alison should make herself useful.

"I would rather be excused."

"But ma says you must!"

"Must—why?"

"A hand is wanted at the whist table, and I want Bevil at the piano, all to myself."

"It is utterly impossible. I have a headache," replied Alison, goaded to desperation.

"Bother your headache!" was the elegant response ; "try sal volatile, Rimmel's vinegar, anything, but come."

However, Alison remained inflexible, and so far from making herself "useful" to either Mrs. De Jobbins and her daughter, by appearing in their circle downstairs, she retired to bed—to think and weep—but not to sleep.

The vicar of Chilcote was, she knew, in town, and to him she would appeal to procure her another home, where she would hear the name of Bevil Goring no more !

CHAPTER LXII.

THE FORECLOSURE EFFECTED.

WHILE Dalton, under Laura's care and nursing, had been fast recovering health and strength, on leave of absence, at Chilcote Grange ; and Jerry Wilmot, though less tenderly cared for at Wilmothurst, surrounded as he was then by every luxury and comfort still, was also fast learning to forget all he had endured in Ashanti, and all the natural buoyancy of his spirits was returning, Lady Julia was as full of unspeakable animosity at Mr. Chevenix as the languid character of her aristocratic nature would permit her to be.

A regular breach had replaced the cool indifference with which she had viewed that personage. In the profundity of his plebeian insolence he had at last taken full measures to ob-

tain the interest on his mortgages, and more, he had foreclosed them, and ruin now awaited the house of Wilmot!

And again and again, while tenderly caressing Flossie, or having her long tresses brushed out by Mademoiselle Florine, she languidly bewailed to Cousin Emily, or to Jerry, who lingered near her with the cigar in hand he dared not light in her presence, that "the artful pillager of the Wilmot estates would drive her to a beggar's grave in a foreign land."

Though Jerry thought life was too short "for all this sort of thing," and was making up his mind to "cut the whole thing" and go to India, he was still on friendly terms with old Mr. Chevenix, but nevertheless was greatly ruffled by stories that reached him of Lord Twesildown's attention to Bella, and was once, as he phrased it, "awfully cut up," when coming upon them riding together without even a groom in attendance, and nearly overtook them in a green lane—yea, would have done so, had he not timely drawn the bridle of his own horse.

They had been laughing and talking amicably—certainly more like friends, it would seem, than lovers, as gossip averred them to be; and with aching heart and eager and admiring eyes, poor Jerry Wilmot—poor in more ways than one, for he was a ruined man now—observed the air and bearing of the handsome girl, in her dark blue riding habit—a costume so fitted for the display of every womanly grace—while from her slender waist she moved with every movement of her horse, the very action of which seemed to assert that he was proud of having such a rider.

Still more was Jerry "cut up" and then perplexed when, soon after, he met Mr. Chevenix, who, with a twinkle in his eye whether of pride or mischief the said Jerry failed to detect—informed him, somewhat unnecessarily, as he thought, that Lord Twesildown had proposed to Bella.

"Proposed!" repeated Jerry, in a rather breathless voice.

"Yes."

"And when does the—the marriage come off?"

"It won't come off at all."

"Why?"

"She has refused him."

"Refused him?"

"Yes; odd, isn't it? Can't make Bella out at all," replied Mr. Chevenix, as he nodded, smiled, and trotted away on his cob.

Jerry was, we say, perplexed on hearing of this. Bella's refusal of Twesildown's hand delighted him greatly, but was it born of regard for himself or regard for someone else? He had not gone near her for some time past, and knew not how many might have been hovering about her, now that, with all her beauty and brilliance apart, she was known as the virtual heiress of Wilmothurst.

It filled him with many thoughts that were difficult of arrangement and of analysis. He resolved to pay her a farewell visit anyway, and told his lady mother that he would do so.

"That girl again!" said Lady Julia, as he rode off. "I did not think that he had actually involved himself with her."

"Nor has he, perhaps, auntie," sighed Cousin Emily, though her heart made her suspect otherwise.

"I believe Jerry to be, like many young men of the present day," resumed Lady Julia, still obtuse as to the new situation, "one of those who think they can—especially with a girl of her position in society—go to the utmost confines of love-making—can look, say, and do what they please, and yet do and say nothing that will quite compromise them, or involve their honour; and girls such as the Chevenix quite understand the matter. But that there should be more in it passes my comprehension, and yours too, darling Flossie," she added taking the cur out of its mother-of-pearl basket and kissing its nose tenderly.

She spoke, as usual, languidly and softly, for she was ever one of those who deem that "feeling, or any betrayal of it, is a sure sign of an ill-bred person"—bad form, in short.

Meanwhile Jerry was *tête-à-tête* with Bella Chevenix in her pretty little drawing-room overlooking the ivy-clad church and the village green.

Jerry was rather grave, for Bella had been piqued by his absence, and received him, he thought, rather coldly, which led him to fear there "was some other fellow in the field;" but anon Bella began to rally him, for she could not but remember that the letter he had written on the night before Coomassie was entered, amounted quite to a declaration.

"I begin to sicken of the world and all its bitterness, Bella," said he, a little irrelevantly, on which she sang softly:

Oh, what shall I be at fifty,
If I am then alive,
If I find the world so bitter
When I am barely twenty-five?

"I wonder if you will be so merry when we meet again, years hence, if ever," said Jerry, almost angrily.

"Years hence—what do you mean, Jerry—for I must call you Jerry as of old, if you adopt this tone?" said she, regarding his now grave face attentively.

"I go to the Horse Guards to-morrow to arrange about an exchange for India."

"Why?"

"Can you ask—when you know that I am a ruined and beggared man?"

He was looking doggedly out of the window, and did not see how her sensitive lips quivered, and how her shapely bodice was heaving with the painful pulsations of her warm and affectionate heart; for Bella—impulsive Bella—felt that if she said only a little more she must break down altogether; and the muscles of her slender throat ached with the efforts she made to keep back her desire to weep.

"Ruined—Jerry—you?" she said after a pause.

"You know how, and why; the past is over—at an end, and for ever; but do think of me kindly, Bella, when I am far away from you—for my own kindred are few and cold—yea, seem to have little heart for me."

"Jerry, dear Jerry," said the girl in a low voice, "ere this, I thought you would have asked me to marry—to—to marry you."

"I dared not, Bella."

"Why?"

"Lest you might misunderstand me."

"But you—you love me?"

"God alone knows how well!"

"Then, Jerry, will *you* marry me?" she said, while her sweet voice sank into a pleading whisper; "I have always loved you!"

Jerry caught her wildly in his arms.

"Bella—my wife—my own little wife at last!" exclaimed Jerry in a rather broken voice, as they kissed each other solemnly and passionately, for all doubts between them were ended now.

"Oh, Bella darling," said Jerry, after sundry incoherences had been indulged in, "though far, far away from you, I often dreamed of such an hour as this—for I was always with you in the spirit."

"I would rather have had you, as I have you now, you dear, provoking old Jerry, in the flesh," replied Bella, with one of her arch and waggish smiles. "It is much more satisfactory."

So Wilmothurst would return to the old line again, in all its vast extent of fertile acreage, and with the latter would come a bride second to none in brilliance and beauty that had ever come there before, though not—like haughty Lady Julia, the daughter of ever so many earls—but of a hale, stout, and warm-hearted old fellow, who loved Jerry as his own son—though, sooth to say, we fear he will never be able to abide his mother, who eventually took up her abode, in sullen and stately grandeur, with Cousin Emily, at the restored Dower House in Langley Park.

So Jerry did not go up to the Horse Guards after all, but quietly and rapidly set about the arrangements for his marriage, which was very soon to come about; and, meanwhile, as may be supposed, he spent every spare hour—and he had a good many of them—with Bella.

"The joy of my life is a *tête-à-tête* with you, dearest Bella," said Jerry, as he lay on the grass at her feet one evening smoking his briar-root. "My lady mother's manner is so cold and stately that she quite thrusts all a poor fellow's heart back upon himself. By Jove, you should have seen her mode of welcoming me home after our shindy in Ashanti! I would have preferred less etiquette and more love; some of the kissing and clinging some of our poor fellows, like Tony Dalton, received on the day we landed at Portsmouth."

"Poor Jerry! you will never want for kisses now," said Bella, laughingly.

"By-the-by, I have a letter from Goring, who is again in town, and cutting quite a figure, I hear, in the world of fashion."

"Has he heard aught yet of Miss Cheyne, poor girl?" asked Bella, who naturally took a deep interest in all love affairs, especially just then.

"He says that he has not. Here is his epistle; but that he is bored to death by a soap-boiler's widow and her daughter, an absurd couple, whom, for his sins, he met at the house of Taype, his solicitor, and who have made a dead set at him—waylay him in the Park with their carriage, haunt the vicinity of his club, and pester him with invitations."

“‘They are shameless in their mode of teasing me, these devilish women,’ he continues, ‘and seem to possess the power of ubiquity, and bid fair to run me to earth. I must either cut them or hook it, and come back to the camp.’ Only fancy, Bella, what odd creatures they must be !”

“But everyone has not the wealth and handsome person of Captain Goring.”

“Yes ; and Bevil is one of the right good sort.”

So there were two sides to the picture drawn by the fervid fancy or vanity of Miss Victoria De Jobbys : and Alison Cheyne, had she known all, need not have wept so bitterly far into the hours of the night, as related.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HOMELESS.

WITH Alison events were fated to follow each other fast now.

On the day subsequent to the dinner-party at Pembridge Square she felt too ill to leave her bed till the afternoon was well advanced. She was, however, visited by Miss De Jobbys, who gave her a very inflated account of Goring's attentions to herself, how she completely “snuffed out the three Le Robbynson girls,” and gave him credit for many flattering, and certainly peculiar, utterances that Alison thought very unlike the Goring that she knew. Still she was painfully uncertain what to think, and was very glad when her garrulous visitor, after readjusting her frizzed hair in the mirror and inspecting the few trifles that lay on the toilet-table, took her departure.

Alison, we have said, could not throw herself in Goring's way ; her pride and delicacy, all love apart, revolted at the idea ; and she now actually trembled lest the chance mention of her not very common name by any of the De Jobbys' family might lead to the discovery of her identity in her present humble position.

And now a letter, on the envelope of which a coronet figured, was, after being long inspected, and the cause of much surmise by Mrs. and Miss De Jobbys, handed to her by a servant. She opened it and read. It would seem that, though

Bevil Goring had failed to obtain from the vicar of Chilcote the London address of Alison and a clue to her circumstances, the "Right Honourable Lord Cadbury" had succeeded in obtaining both, in virtue of his rank, we presume; and the result was this letter, most subtly and cunningly worded, and dated not from his club or from Cadbury Court, but from the villa of his "lady friend" at St. John's Wood, offering her a home *there*, and containing what she conceived at first to be another offer of marriage; but, on re-reading it, the real meaning of and nature of the document came before her, in all its insulting form and truth, as it fell from her hand here she tore it into minute fragments with trembling fingers. She grew deadly pale, but her lips became firm and set; her bosom heaved, and all the purity of her nature, her pride of old position and race, *l'esprit de famille* which her father had inculcated rose within her, she covered her face with her hands as if to thrust back her tears, and exclaimed, in a low voice: "Oh, papa, papa! It wanted but this insult to complete the humiliation of my life!"

So the *parvenu* peer sought—but in vain—to put a keystone to the edifice of his own innate rascality.

At last she rose from her bed and proceeded to dress herself with the intention of visiting the vicar without delay to beseech him to find her another home; but—on looking about her toilet-table, where she had certainly left it overnight—she missed her locket—the locket with the likeness of Bevil in it!

She instituted a strict if hurried search over all her little room, but no trace of it could be found.

The servant who had brought breakfast to her on a covered salver had never approached the toilet-table she was certain; but Miss De Jobbys had, as she remembered, lingered before the mirror, and trifled with the little etceteras that lay thereby.

Could she be the abductor, the delinquent, the thief?

Impossible! Yet Alison had barely completed attiring herself for the street, with the intention of asking permission to go out for a little time, when a maid appeared, sent by Mrs. De Jobbys, to request her presence in the drawing-room.

"In the drawing-room," thought Alison; "what does that import?"

On entering, the first object that caught her eye was her locket in that lady's hand, and she had a perfect conviction

that the latter and her daughter were inflamed with keen resentment.

"Jealousy," we are told, "smacks of low life and the drama." Be that as it may, Alison was now fated to a sample thereof.

"Is this your property, Miss Cheyne?" asked Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbyns, frigidly, yet tremulous with passion.

"It is; and how came it in your possession, I demand?" exclaimed Alison.

"You demand?"

"Yes."

"That matters little."

"It matters very much indeed," said Alison, her spirit rising to the occasion; "a theft has been committed, else my locket would have been where I left it, on my toilet-table."

"Do not attempt to bandy words with me," said the lady of the mansion, assuming a bullying tone. "But how is it that the likeness of a friend of this family—of a gentleman visitor—a stranger to a person in your position, of course—is in your possession?"

"And how do you dare to wear it?" added Miss De Jobbyns, in a shrill voice of passion, as her mother tossed the locket to the feet of Alison, who regained it, and deliberately placed it in the bosom of her dress.

"What would he—what must *we*—think of you?" asked Mrs. De Jobbyns, in a louder key.

Alison disdained to make any reply.

"You are unfit to teach my darlings—if you have not corrupted their angel minds already—and I request you to quit Pembridge Square at once. The housekeeper will give you what is due in lieu of a month's notice."

Alison had not been unprepared for this dictum. She had heard it without a shock, and, though certainly dismayed by the sudden turn her affairs had taken, at once prepared for and took her departure.

She kissed and bade adieu to her two little pupils, Irene and Iseulte, whose names had no doubt been suggested by the *London Journal*—a periodical much affected by Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbyns in her youth, and then drove away.

The daughter of the house, enraged and bewildered, knew not precisely *what* to think of the affair, but she had a gloomy fear that so far as Bevil Goring was concerned her hopes were vanishing into thin air, or on the eve of being shattered like

the crystal in the basket of Alnaschar, of whom no doubt she never heard.

As the cab quitted the square, Alison shrank back on perceiving Sir Jasper Dehorsey (or "Captain Smith," as she supposed him to be) ambling his horse slowly along, and watching—as she had before known him to do—the windows of the house she had just quitted for ever ; and this incident, with the memory of Cadbury's cruel and cowardly letter, filled her heart with horror, bitterness, and dismay. She felt so well-nigh penniless and helpless too.

The summer sunshine was in all its brightness and glory, but Alison felt as if a mist surrounded her, and as if the surging of great waters was in her ears, and she feared that she might faint.

Almost at the same moment she quitted Pembridge Square, Bevil Goring entered it to leave his card, like a well-bred man, on the De Jobbyns family, whom he devoutly hoped to find "not at home." Indeed, he selected the time when he knew that the mother and daughter were generally "hairing" themselves, as they called it, in the Row, and as he drew near the house he came suddenly upon a well-known form and figure.

"What, Archie ! faithful old Archie Auchindoir—you here !" he exclaimed, as he shook the old man's hand with ardour. "Can it be you ?"

"By my certie it is, sir," replied Archie, "and pleased I am to see a kent face in this unco human wilderness o' brick wa's."

"And what are you doing here now that poor Sir Ranald is dead ?"

"Just what he wad hae dune—watching owre missie, sir."

"And where is she, Archie—where is she ?"

"Where her forbears wad little like to see her."

"How—where—what ?" asked Goring, impetuously.

"Governess to some brats in the square up bye."

"What square ?"

"Paimbrig Square ?" replied Archie, adapting the name to his own vernacular.

"And whose children ?"

"A Mrs. De Jobbyns she ca's hersel'," replied Archie, with a contemptuous smirk on his wrinkled visage.

"My God !" exclaimed Goring, growing red and pale alternately ; "my darling reduced to this, and all unknown to me ! When came this about ?"

"A week or two after the master gaed to his lang hame,

sir. Puir Sir Ranald !” said Archie, with a break in his voice ; “after a’ he had possest and tint, a kist and a sheet was a’ he needed in the lang rin.”

“And you have been watching over her, you say ?” asked Goring, again taking the old man’s hand in his own.

“I had a wee pickle silver saved, and I thought—I thought—but never mind ; a’ the men in the Mearns can do nae mair than they may.”

“And she is in Pembridge Square now ?”

“Yes, sir.”

He slipped a card with his address into Archie’s hand, and hurried to the house, where the startling ring he gave the bell brought an indignant housemaid to the door speedily as a genii of the Lamp.

“Mrs. and Miss De Jobbyns,” she answered, “*was* not at home, having just driven off to the Park.”

“Thank heaven !—and Miss Cheyne ?”

“The governess ?”

“Yes—yes—is she at home ?”

He was rather curtly informed that she had been dismissed from her “situation,” and with her trunk had left the house a short time ago.

“Dismissed and gone—where ?”

“No one in the house knew.”

He turned away in great agony of mind ; and he had in his haste forgotten to ask Archie where *he* lived. He looked about him in every direction, but the old man was nowhere to be seen.

And so she would be utterly homeless now.

Homeless, and in London—and she so young, so tender, and beautiful !

Alas ! more evils than ever the Black Hound of Essilmont forbode might be in store for his Alison now.

CHAPTER LXIV.

CONCLUSION.

So she was out in the world once more, with apparently no earthly tie to bind her to it.

“Could I but see Bevil’s face once more and then die !” was her thought, as, blinded with the hot tears that flowed

under her veil, she was driven through the sunny and crowded streets of pleasant Bayswater.

We have said that the vicar of Chilcote was now in town ; he had brought his family with him, and was residing in private apartments not far from Pembroke Square, and overlooking Kensington Gardens. Thus Alison's first thoughts—indeed her only resource—was to throw herself upon him as she had before intended ; but now she was terrified that, if he naturally made inquiries of Mrs. De Jobbins, in the spirit of sourness or malevolence she might give a very distorted account of the late episode ; and, indeed, the worthy old man was greatly disturbed when she told him her simple tale, as the same ideas occurred to himself, and he saw all the peril of giving the name of that irate matron as a reference to anyone else ; and thus for two entire days he remained in sore perplexity what to do.

On the third he began again to question Alison, whom he kept with his family.

“And the portrait which caused this grotesque disturbance—the portrait of this gentleman is that of your *fiancé* ?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Were you engaged to him with your father's consent ?” asked he, suspiciously, while he regarded her keenly, but not unkindly, under his shaggy white eyebrows.

“No—to my sorrow be it said,” replied Alison, with a little hesitation.

“That seems wrong—why ?”

“He was not rich enough then to suit papa's views, having little more than his pay.”

“*Then*—is he rich now ?”

“Yes—more than rich—even wealthy.”

“And has he since sought you out ?”

“No,” sobbed Alison.

The vicar shook his white head and groaned.

“What is his name ?” he asked, and Alison told him.

“Goring—Goring,” said he, pulling his nether lip thoughtfully ; “I have heard the name. He called on me more than once to ask your London address, as also did Lord Cadbury of Cadbury Court ; but suspecting his object, I declined to give it.”

“Oh, why ?”

“He is an officer—and officers are often wild and unscrupulous fellows. You are young, more than most attractive, and are without a protector—you understand ?”

"Oh, sir, how you have wronged him!"

"I am sorry you think so, but——"

"Good heavens, you may have parted me and Bevil for ever!" she exclaimed, in a voice of intense pathos and sorrow.

"Not so, my darling—I am here!" said Bevil Goring, who had entered unannounced by the boarding-house servant, and in a moment his arms were round her and her head upon his breast.

The darkest hour is always that before the dawn, it is said, even as clouds are a prelude to sunshine.

It is chiefly in novels and on the stage, but seldom in real life, that people start and scream, or faint and fall; so Alison, on finding herself suddenly face to face with the object of all her dearest and tenderest thoughts, felt only her colour change and her heart give a kind of leap within her breast; while power so completely seemed to leave her limbs for some moments that she would have slid on the carpet but for the support of Bevil's caressing arms, and for more than a minute neither spoke, for great emotion induces silence.

So she remained folded in his close embrace—content, safe in the shelter of his arms, with her white face nestling on his breast, while he showered kisses upon it and her hair.

"Captain Goring," said the vicar, "how did you discover that she was here—with me?"

"She wrote to her old servant whither she had gone, and he informed me without delay at my club. He did not distrust me, as you, sir, did."

"I trust, Captain Goring, you will pardon that now, 'as all is well that ends well,'" replied the vicar, with a smile, and thinking wisely that he might be rather *de trop* just then, he withdrew to another apartment.

Goring now held her at arm's length to survey her face, it was so long since he had last looked upon it, and then drew her closer again to his breast. After a time, he asked: "What is all this that I have been told about your being a governess—Alison, love, tell me?"

"I am one now—at least, I was one, in a house in Pembroke Square."

"With a family called De Jobbins—absurd name!"

"Yes."

"Is this a riddle—a joke, or what?" said he, giving his moustache an almost angry twitch.

"No riddle or joke," replied Alison, sweetly. "I seemed to have no friend in the world to aid me, and I had my bread to earn."

"My poor darling !"

"Yes—poor indeed."

"And you have left that woman ?"

"No."

"How ?"

"She dismissed me bluntly and coarsely."

"Why?" asked Goring, striking the floor with his spurred heel.

"I was dismissed with a month's salary, because I had been detected wearing your likeness—here, in my locket."

A smile that rippled into a laugh spread over the face of Goring, who, recalling the mode in which he had been hunted by mother and daughter, took in the whole situation.

Calm speech and connected utterance came now to both, and many mutual explanations were made, and mutual tender assurances given more than once ; for both had much to relate and to hear ; nor with both—Alison especially—without false impressions that required removal.

"And *you* were actually in Antwerp too?" exclaimed Alison, when she heard his story.

"I traced you there, only to lose you again—though many times I must have passed the door of the very place where you lay ill. Oh, my darling ! what you must have endured !"

Her transitory emotions of gratitude to Cadbury for his supposed birthday gift made Goring laugh again when he saw her wonder and joy that it had come from himself, and that she learned the erector of the marble cross was himself also. Thus, when Bevil felt her tears and kisses on his cheek, he thought that never were gifts so pleasantly repaid. With Alison, it would all be rest hereafter. "Trials and troubles might come," as a writer has it ; though further trials and troubles seemed at a low computation just then ; "but nothing would tear her great tree up by the roots again."

Alison felt just a little emotion of shame, and that she kept to herself. He had never doubted her love (though he had feared her father's influence), but she had not been without twinges of doubt, especially after the day of the Four-in-Hand meeting by the Serpentine.

"How trivial, at first, seem the events that rule our lives—that shape our destinies—our future," said Goring. "Had I

not, by the merest chance, met poor old Archie, heaven alone knows when I might have traced you."

Hour after hour passed by, and she forgot all about the vicar, and even of where they were.

She would recall the past time at Chilcote, when the first vague emotion of happiness in his presence and his society—pleasure that was almost, strange to say, a kind of sweet pain—stole over her; when she was half-afraid to meet his eye, and when each stolen glance at the other led to much secret perturbation of spirit, and when a touch of the hand seemed to reveal something that was new, as the glamour of a first love stole into the hearts of both.

How long, long ago, seemed that day on which they rode with the Buckhounds, and took their fences together side by side.

We have not much more to relate, as in a little time they were able to glide pleasantly away into the unnoticed mass of married folks; yet to Alison it would be always delightful to think that she had, at her will and bidding, a fine manly fellow like Bevil Goring—one whom brave men had been proud to follow—for she had a keen appreciation of soldierly renown; and he had more than a paragraph to his name in the Annual Army List.

We have said, we think, in a preceding chapter that he wrote to his solicitors an important letter concerning the acquisition of certain property at Chilcote; thus when he took Archie Auchindoir into his service as a personal valet (which he did forthwith), great was the astonishment of the old man on first entering his master's rooms in Piccadilly at what he saw there, and a cry of joy escaped him and he almost wept.

There hung all the old family pictures, and there were many a relic and chattel dearly prized by Sir Ranald and Alison too, in that superstition of the heart, which few sensitive or affectionate natures are without.

There on the sideboard was the great silver tankard, the gift of Queen Elizabeth—the Bride of the Bruce—filled with red wine and emptied on hundreds of occasions by many successions of Cheynes, even after the 24th of June, 1314, was nigh forgotten, and above it hung the portraits of the two pale, haughty, yet dashing and noble-looking cavalier brothers, with their love-locks and long rapiers, who fell in battle for the King of Scotland, and Archie, greeting them as old friends, passed his

shrivelled hands tenderly and caressingly over the unconscious canvas, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"A' for her, a' for her—God bless him!" he muttered, knowing well why Goring had rescued these objects from Sir Ranald's creditors.

In Piccadilly, Archie, though rather a puzzle to Goring's other servants—his grooms, coachman, and so forth—found himself "in clover"; and, till the marriage came off, Alison was to remain with the family of the vicar, who was to perform the ceremony, at which little Netty Dalton figured as a bridesmaid.

After all she had undergone, and had feared she might yet have to undergo, she was again with Goring—his strong arms round her, his lips upon her cheek and brow!

She was at times confused, bewildered—unable to comprehend it all. She could but lay her head upon his breast and resign herself to the rapture of the occasion, and close her eyes as if it would be happiness even if she opened them no more.

How joyous was that mute embrace—that love-making without words—the spell that neither knew how—or wished—to break! All her past woes, and all her future hopes, seemed merged in the joy of the present time; while the pressure of Bevil's hand, his impassioned murmur, his fond gaze and studious tenderness, his attention to every wish and want, caused a sense of joy in her soul of which it had never been conscious before.

As Jerry said, in his off-hand way, when he visited them, like Bella and himself, "they were in a high state of sentimental gush."

Now she knew that she belonged to Goring, and he to her, and that the life and love of each belonged to each other, that they would be always together till death—a distant event, let us hope—parted them; that his handsome face would never smile on another woman as it smiled on her; and that no other woman's lips would be touched by him as hers had been on the day she ceased to be Alison Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk.

THE END.

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